PRIVATE EYE

No. 1002
Friday
19 May 2000
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ROYAL BABY — A NATION WAITS

Hurry up, darling, before the hospital closes down
Get me a spin-midwife!
They're going to have a little vote winner
Nice to see *someone* in Labour

*Survey undertaken by NOP Market Research among 1,000 randomly selected bank customers. Interviews were conducted by telephone between 18 Nov 1999 and 10 Dec 1999. For written details write to First Direct, Freepost, Leeds LS98 2RF. We reserve the right to decline to open an account for you. To maintain a quality service, calls may be monitored and/or recorded. Applicants must be 18 or over. Credit facilities are subject to status. All UK customer calls charged at local rate. First Direct is a division of HSBC Bank plc.

being held to ransom by corporate time bandits?

You wouldn't leave the freezer open all day because you needed chips out for dinner. Or stand by the washing machine waiting for your family to dirty their clothes. Or sit down at lunchtime to get ready for Eastenders to start. Or turn up the central heating in the middle of a heatwave for that matter. So why do you let your bank waste your time (and money)? By making you stand in a queue. Wait until they're open.

hands off your time now!

We do things differently. We know that your time is, well... your time. So when you want to sort out your banking we make sure we use as little of it as possible, and allow you to do things in the most convenient way. By Internet, mobile phone and telephone banking. 24 hours a day, everyday. So you can get on with what you want to do. Climbing a mountain. Reading a book. Time with the children. Getting some sleep. Expanding your horizons.

warm and fluffy about free banking

It's your money after all. We don't charge you for everyday banking transactions. Direct debits, standing orders, statements and withdrawals at almost 7,000 specified cash machines across the UK – including those of HSBC Bank and NatWest – are all free. We're even cuddly about overdrafts – every customer automatically gets a fee free £250 one when they join us.

nearly a million successful missions to date

We may be as waggy-tailed as a puppy about free banking, but when it comes to rescuing people from time-wasting banks we're lean, mean and keen. Although we perform our rescues by Internet and telephone rather than grappling hooks and ropes. A bank with a mission to give you back the time (and money) that's rightfully yours. Our customers have certainly felt the benefit. Nearly a million of them now enjoy more freedom because of us. And 94% of them have recommended us to at least one of their friends*.

rescued in 30 minutes

More exciting still, if you're still shackled to the ball and chain of opening hours, lunchtime queues and bank charges, we can rescue you in 30 minutes. That's all the time it should take you to transfer your banking. Simply complete an application form over the phone or at our website, sign and return the account transfer authority we'll send you and we'll do the rest. There's not a moment to lose.

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life

if anyone's going to fritter it away pointlessly it should be you, not your bank

TM

The New CD-ROM business directory which is so powerful the powerful already want it banned

Called UK-Info Power, it is another first from the company which put 55 million Britons on a single CD-ROM Disk. And the new disk is causing just as much furore as the first one. To the outrage of the privacy lobby is now added the cries of protest from the business institutions. In the latest instance, I-CD Publishing has yet again, it seems, done the unthinkable: *it has made public the names and addresses of company directors.* Only the Archbishop of Canterbury has yet to condemn it from the pulpit.

So, as you might expect, UK-Info Power is already selling like hot cakes.

The charges against it are so predictable that I-CD could have written the script for all those who headed hot-foot to denounce it on radio, or who fumed about it to the press.

Dangerous. A licence for anarchists. An incitement to assault, rape, kidnapping, harrassment, siege, and an insidious threat to the continued existence of the British Empire *(shurely shome mistake? – Ed.)* Well, perhaps not that, but you get the message. The point is, IT SHOULD BE BANNED.

OK, so it gives the names and home addresses of 3.8 million company directors. And because it has a state-of-the-art map you can actually pinpoint where they live, and the best way to get there. And true, if their company just fobs off complaints, and indulges in very dodgy dealing, they just might now get a telephone call at home, or find some enraged customer banging on their front door.

But oddly that isn't why people are buying it. They want it because it provides desktop information on the whole British business community – turnover, profits, business addresses, directors, employees and associations between one company and another (which may otherwise not be clearly identifiable).

So – surprise – it is companies which are buying it. In any case, at £229.95 it is not exactly an impulse purchase for someone with a £50 grudge.

For companies – and there are 2.7 million on the disk – UK-Info Power does what on-line fails to do. It cuts out costly, time-consuming and frequently fruitless searches on the Internet. It also removes the drudge of sending someone down to Companies House to look it all up and waste half-a-day doing so.

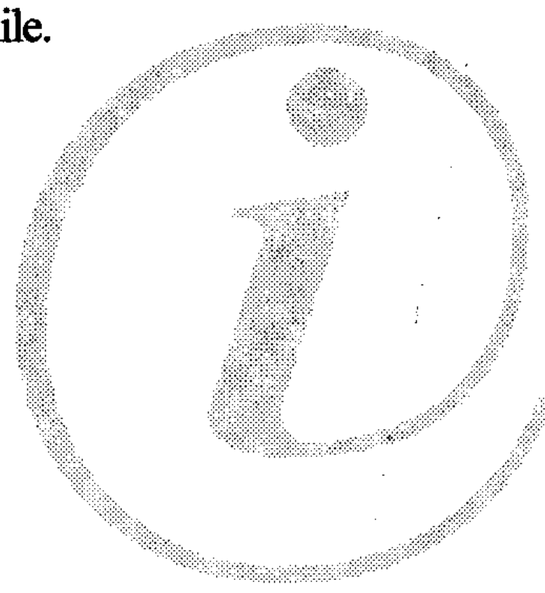
Moreover, it helps root out the shady, the cowboys, the fly-by-nights, and the people they would never want to do business with. For the rip-off merchant, in short, there is now no hiding place.

Otherwise it's good news. UK-Info Power (whisper it) is *business friendly.*

And after all, if that wasn't so what would be the point of it? Nobody would buy it – except, of course, a handful of nutters. And there are just not enough of them to make it worthwhile.

They may be mad.

We aren't.



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UK-Info Power - Business CD ROM Edition

Millions of people are still working and claiming benefit.

It's not fraud, it's government policy.

Getting people off welfare and into work is not only very desirable - it's government policy.

The trouble is that when people who have been dependent on benefits eventually get a job they often find that they are paid the national minimum wage.

And the minimum wage - set by the government - is so low that they still need state benefits to bring it up to a level that will provide for their basic needs.

What this means is that taxpayers' money is being used to subsidise the wage bills of private companies, most of which make good profits.

It should come as no surprise therefore that the loudest voices opposing a higher minimum wage are the very employers who are receiving this indirect handout. They say that if the minimum wage was equivalent to a living wage, jobs would simply disappear.

But there is ample evidence that people who are paid an adequate wage are far more productive than those who are living on the poverty line.

So much so, that the modest amounts required are more than repaid by increased output and profits.

A prosperous economy with a well paid workforce means the government will receive more in tax revenue and pay out less on welfare benefits.

A national minimum wage of £5 per hour will help to achieve and maintain this objective.

For more information on the National Minimum Wage and other workplace issues, visit our website at www.unison.org.uk, or to join us call 0800 5 97 97 50.

UNISON

Gnome

IT IS a serious matter indeed when the Press Complaints Commission delivers a vote of censure to a newspaper and its editor as they have done this week to the Daily Gnome and Mr Moron.

As proprietor of the Gnome, let me say that I accept unreservedly the PCC's judgement that Mr Moron "fell short of the high standards expected of tabloid editors when he made a stack of money out of shares his own paper had tipped".

However, the PCC also made it clear that Mr Moron had done nothing wrong in their view and that his story about not reading his own newspaper made perfect sense.

In the light of this judgement it is clear that Mr Moron did make a fundamental mistake – he got caught.

I shall, therefore, be punishing him by giving him a new 5-year contract with an increased salary and share options. (Buy now! Gnome PLC is going places! Fill your boots, readers!)

I hope this makes it clear to everyone how seriously the Gnome organisation takes this minor matter.

E. Strobes
pp Lord Victor Gnome
The Daily Moron
Canary Wharf
London FTSE 370.

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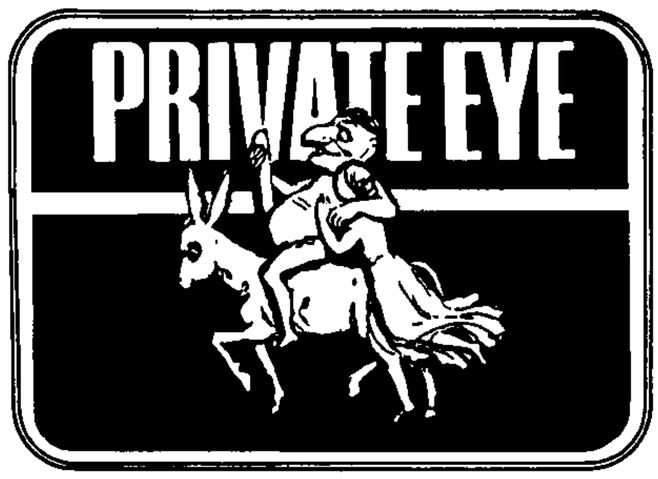

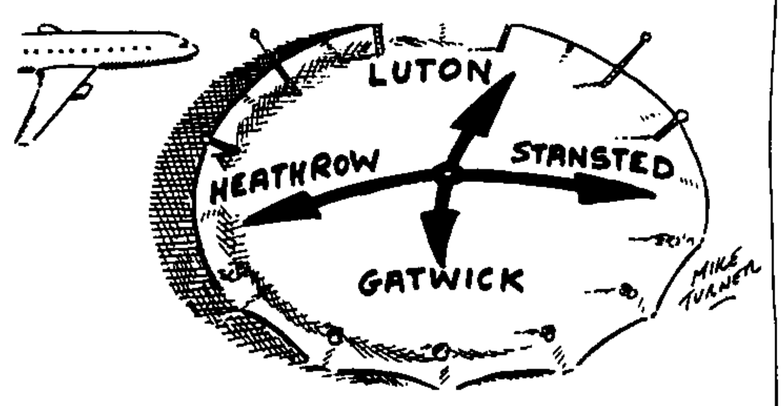

A DOCUMENT leaked to the *Eye* this month shows that Railtrack is still living by the skin of its teeth – despite being so cocky that it has issued a claim for damages against Thames Trains for the Paddington smash.

The driver of an express train from London Liverpool Street on 3 May was told by a Railtrack signaller that he had a clear line ahead – only to find himself switched into the path of a freight train near Witham, Essex. Fortunately both drivers realised what was happening and the passenger train came to a halt facing the freight. The error arose from the usual signalling system being out of use because of engineering work.

For decades trains in these circumstances have been safely "talked past" red lights by signallers – but only with strict double-checking of the signaller's instructions and actions. That time-honoured method failed at Witham. Whatever the exact reason, the incident amounted to a "systems failure" (the Health and Safety Executive's description of the Paddington crash).

This time Railtrack's skin was saved by the vigilance of train drivers – much-maligned since the Southall and Paddington crashes – and Railtrack will not be receiving a writ like the one it served on Thames Trains.

THE battle over the £750m contract for the BVRAAM missile for the Eurofighter – one of the biggest arms contracts currently on offer – looks very much like the spat over helicopters which sank Michael Heseltine as defence secretary in 1986, and nearly sank the Tory government.

On the one hand is a relatively cheap version – manufactured in this case by the US arms firm Raytheon. On the other is a rather more expensive missile manufactured by a home-grown consortium including British Aerospace.

Raytheon is backed to the hilt by US president Bill Clinton. It also has the advantage of a secret intelligence network known as Echelon, which specialises in finding out details of rival bids. Its executives boast that they can tap into phone messages, faxes, etc, through Britain's top secret base at Menwith Hill.

These dubious activities on behalf of a foreign arms company at Menwith Hill were once the subject of an "intense" investigation by the European parliament – an investigation which has been suddenly and mysteriously called off after pressure from Britain's Labour group in Europe.

Somewhat at sea in the big league, the British consortium is reduced to some patriotic advertising featuring a fighter pilot ("he risked his life for the Falklands, Kuwait and Kosovo. The last thing he needs is a threat from Arizona"). Actually, Raytheon doesn't hail from Arizona but from rather less foreign-sounding New England.

BAe is also hoping that it has won the support of Tony Blair with its lavish subsidies of the dome and its "sponsorship" of the Labour party. But Gordon Brown is sticking up for the Americans because their missile is cheaper. The smart money is on the Chancellor.

IS "NEW" Labour favourite Nicky Gavron really flexible enough to become Ken Livingstone's deputy mayor in London?

Sitting on John Prescott's Commission for Integrated Transport while Ken opposes tube privatisation might cause a normal politician headaches. And chairing the pro-business lobby London First, whose leader Stephen O'Brien spent so much time slagging Ken off, might also prove embarrassing. But extraordinary scenes at a pre-election meeting in Haringey for Greater London Assembly candidates last month suggested Gavron doesn't mind making a few left-wing noises now and then if it helps her career.

At the Labour Club on 6 April she faced a fairly left-wing audience. Flanked by radical Green and London Socialist Alliance candidates, she appeared to rediscover her roots, telling voters that "I don't believe in tuition fees". The loss of poor students, moreover, was a "waste" and a "disgrace".

Gavron also declared that she had "no problem with taxing the rich". Curiously, though, she said she "could not see the need for private contractors in education" – curious because private contractors are going to take over education in Haringey (where Gavron is a councillor) with the Labour group's assent. Gavron was then seen to buy *Socialist Worker* and *Socialist Worker Review*.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"Coulthard is reputed to shun the playboy lifestyle associated with grand prix drivers."
— Grauniad, 3 May, p. 2

"Coulthard is the latest in a long line of formula one drivers with a passion for jet-setting."
— Grauniad, 3 May, p. 31

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TATE OF THE NATION

THAT LONDON MAYORAL INQUEST IN FULL...

TONY BLAIR has launched a major internal inquiry to ensure that the Livingstone-Dobson fiasco is never, ever, repeated. Here are its preliminary feudings (*"findings", shurely?*)

Tony is absolutely clear. Blame lies with party officials in Millbank for not stopping Red Ken. But Millbank is not taking this lying down. It blames Tony for creating the daft new post of London mayor in the first place – and for being silly enough to imagine that Richard Branson would be the man for the job.

Tony's political adviser Sally Morgan blames party general secretary Margaret McDonagh for setting up a cumbersome electoral college to finish Ken off. McDonagh in turn blames Morgan for failing to alert Tony to the impending crisis. McDonagh also blames Morgan for the long list of daft "alternative to Ken candidates" – which at one time included the (now sacked) chairman of British Airways Robert Ayling, Tony Banks and someone called Nick "Baldy" Raynsford.

Tony, Morgan and McDonagh meanwhile all blame London Labour party chairman Jim Fitzpatrick for the feeble Dobbo campaign in the capital. Morgan also blames Alastair Campbell for the speculative leaks of would-be anti-Ken candidates – usually in time to put them off altogether. Tony, Morgan, McDonagh and Campbell blame Mo Mowlam for first saying she wouldn't stand, and then saying that she might, after Frank Dobson had said that he wouldn't – but had then said that he would. Mo blames Tony's chief of staff Jonathan Powell for lots of nasty things written about her in the newspapers, while Frank blames Powell for completely ballsing up his campaign.

Both Mo and Frank also blame Tony for completely f*****g up generally over London, although Mo is secretly pleased that Ken won. Frank isn't pleased that Ken won, but blames Tony for the gutless, self-serving, half-hearted support he offered to his doomed campaign. Neither Mo nor Frank really wants to talk to Tony any more and Tony doesn't want to talk to them either.

Morgan and McDonagh are pretending to talk to one another again, but no one really believes them. Tony, Morgan, McDonagh, Campbell and Powell are all however agreed on one thing: Dobbo was a pisspoor candidate. Meanwhile who is Frank Dobson's ever-loyal deputy Trevor "the turncoat" Phillips talking to? Why his sworn enemy "Red" Ken Livingstone, of course, in the hope of a job in Ken's cabinet.

The Old Post Office? Go past the Old Bank, turn left at the Old Mill, right at the Old Bakery, then you'll see it between the Old Rectory and the Old Police Station...
THE OLD FORGE
HUNTER

WORLD OF CLUBS

LADY Michele Renouf's defence of her decision to invite David Irving to dinner at the Reform Club has fallen on deaf ears (see *Eye* 1001).

Rather than believe her description of Irving as a "distinguished, incorruptible, controversially-maligned historian", the club's committee has decided to "name" him, barring him from the premises.

The committee can perhaps be excused for choosing not to take Lady Renouf's word. When she married financier Frank "the Bank" Renouf, 28 years her senior, in 1991, she styled herself Countess Ivan-Zadeh-Griaznoff, a title taken from a former marriage, and told her groom that her father was a deceased hotelier.

The marriage lasted only six weeks, however, after it emerged that her real dad was a very much alive Australian taxi driver.

Street Of Shame

THE *Sunday Times* had a gripping exclusive after the May day riots: the Queen Mum was next on the anarchists' hit list.

"The Movement Against the Monarchy [MAM] is planning a demonstration against the royal family outside Buckingham Palace on June 3, with at least 2,000 people expected to take part," revealed a breathless report from Maurice Chittenden and Nicholas Rufford, detailing a threat so enormous that the *Daily Mail* followed it up as a front page lead a mere three days later.

While both papers found space to detail the potential involvement of heroin dealers "holed up in anarchist squats", asylum seekers, Turkish communists, the potential hospitalising of policemen and the hijacking of planes by the Black Panthers, they oddly omitted to mention the exact nature of the "demonstration" as detailed in full on the back of the leaflet the *Sunday Times* used to illustrate its piece.

Perhaps the paper felt it might spoil the story somewhat to reveal that all MAM's followers plan to do is drop their trousers and "moon" at the palace.

FORMULA ONE new boy Jenson Button's move to Monaco for tax reason invokes the indignant fury of Ally Ross in his *Sun* column on Saturday, 6 May.

"Jenson has successfully not crashed his car a couple of times, which entitles him to receive a multi-million pound salary while paying nothing to the country where he grew up," rages Ross. In fact Ross considers all tax exiles "every bit as shabby as benefit cheats – and depriving the exchequer of just as many billions".

Apparently no one has ever told Ross about the, entirely legal tax avoidance antics of his employer Rupert Murdoch, who effectively paid no corporation tax in the UK for 11 years, at a loss to the exchequer of approximately £350 million.

BRITISH hacks in the pay of Rupert Murdoch who have mentioned the close connection between Rod Eddington, the new boss of British Airways, and their parent company have all felt free to heap praise on him.

After all, their overall owner News Corp has a 50 percent stake (which it intends to sell) in the Australian airline Ansett, whence Eddington comes, and Eddington also happens to be a non-exec director of News International.

The "Oz wizard", splashed the *Sun*; while *Sunday Times* business hacks Paul Ham and David Parsley were even more carried away. "They nicknamed him 'God' in his youth, but what will they call him tomorrow, when Rod Eddington, a 50-year-old Australian, ascends the stairway to the heavenly helm of British Airways?"

Watch this space for what could turn out to be a whole new genre of Murdoch journalism – air-plugs.

"SOONER or later most journalists attempt to write a book," Philippa Kennedy observes in the latest issue of *UK Press Gazette*. "For some of us, the big blockbuster which will make our fortune is only 100,000 or so words away. For others, a good contact from the world of showbiz or sport can turn into a nice little earner."

For yet others, there is an even simpler way of writing a book: pinch someone else's material. Five years ago, an *Express* hackette tried to make her fortune by penning an unauthorised biography of Jodie Foster. Alas! She was promptly sued by the American paper *Entertainment Weekly*, from which she had lifted large chunks of the text without acknowledgement or permission. The hapless hackette had to pay damages and publish a grovelling apology in *Entertainment Weekly*.

And who was the bubonic plagiarist? Step forward Philippa Kennedy – who, having failed to turn her blockbuster into a "nice little earner", is now reduced to editing *UK Press Gazette*.

JUST FANCY THAT!

Police are appealing for witnesses to an argument between two drivers which erupted into a road rage brawl.

The incident happened in Edinburgh about 5:30pm on Wednesday at Craigmillar Park at its junction with Lady Road. As a result of a row between the drivers of a Ford Transit and a Renault Megane, a fight developed involving several people.

— The Scotsman, News Section, 5 May

You don't find traffic madness on Scottish side of Border.

— The Scotsman, Motoring Section, 5 May

AT THE *Daily Mail*'s morning conference on Wednesday 3 May executives were excited to notice a great scoop on the news-list for the following day's paper: an Eton schoolboy had been arrested during the anarchic May Day shenanigans in London.

Come the morrow, however, the *Mail* failed to mention the Etonian at all. He was splashed all over the *Sun* and *Express* instead.

Why on earth would *Mail* editor Paul Dacre spike such a story? His decision was, of course, entirely unrelated to the fact that Dacre's own son is also at Eton, and in the very same house as the alleged "rioter".

CURSE OF THE SUN

IT WAS on Thursday 27 April that the *Sun* teamed up with P&O Stena Line to offer six day-trip deals from Dover to Calais starting at just £1.

The double spread offer was illustrated by a huge picture of P&O's Aquitaine ferry – the same ship that featured in the next day's *Mirror* in a report headed FERRY OF TERROR.

"Passengers told last night how a cross-Channel jaunt turned to panic-stricken terror when their ferry smashed into a harbour wall... Many were hurt when they landed among piles of other passengers aboard the 28,000-ton Aquitaine, the largest in the P&O Stena Line fleet."

LIBEL NEWS

WE ALL make mistakes... but falsely accusing two innocent Protestant businessmen of being members of a secret committee – called, naturally, The Committee – which spent its time slaughtering Catholics is pushing it a bit.

Last week's apology in a Washington courtroom from documentary maker Sean McPhilemy was suitably embarrassing.

As the *Eye* has pointed out before, membership of the alleged Committee mysteriously increased in the six years between Channel 4 broadcasting McPhilemy's original film and the decision of an Irish-American publishing house to bring out his conspiracy theory in written form.

In any case most of the killings described in the book were carried out by genuine terrorist organisations like the UDA and UVF, whose leaders are now hob-nobbing with Northern Ireland secretary Peter Mandelson at Stormont (and just like the Provisionals, not planning to hand in any weapons anytime soon).

The Prentice brothers argued that they were simply Ulster businessmen with unblemished records, and as soon as the judge accepted this McPhilemy surrendered. His witnesses weren't even called, and agreed damages will run upwards of $1m for the Prentices.

GREAT MINDS THINK ALIKE

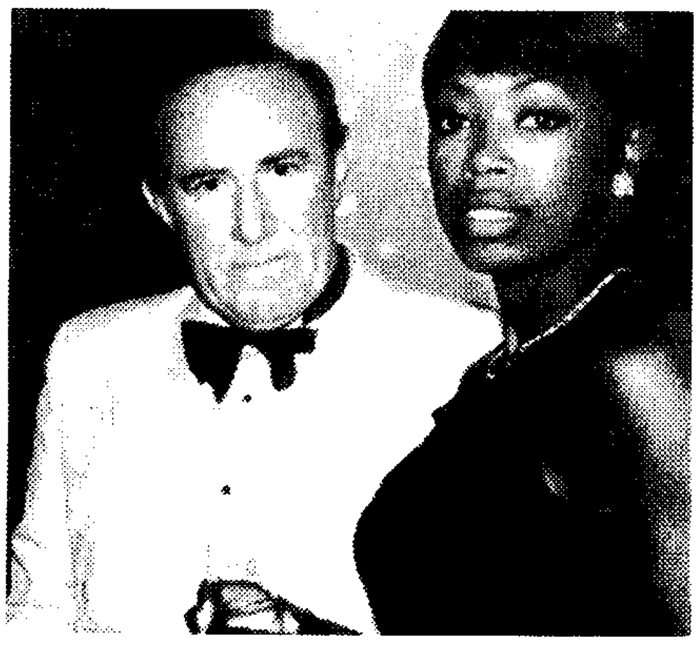
TYPICAL. You wait ages (well, it seems ages since *Cold Feet* finished) for a classy new ensemble drama about a bunch of bright young things... and then two come along at once.

— Charlie Catchpole, "No1 TV Critic", the Mirror, page 9, 2 May

TWENTYSOMETHING drama series are like buses. You wait ages for one and then two come along at once. *Hearts and Bones* had only just pulled away when *Metropolis* (ITV) turned up...

— Tony Purnell, Last Night's View, the Mirror, page 27, 2 May

SCOTSMAN WHA' HAE!



NICE work if you can get it: an annual salary of almost £750,000 for spectacularly screwing up a 200-year-old newspaper. How does Andrew "Brillo Pad" Neill get away with it?

Under Brillo's chaotic part-time leadership from 400 miles away, the *Scotsman* in Edinburgh has descended into a shambles so complete that rivals can scarcely believe their luck. No wonder the Swedish group Bonnier is now planning to launch a new upmarket Scottish broadsheet this summer, staffed largely by refugees from the *Scotsman*, to capture the readers Neill has driven away.

There are plenty of them about: earlier this year sales hit an all-time low of 75,000 – at a time when Scotland and particularly Edinburgh are supposed to be booming following the creation of the Scottish parliament.

Brillo's solution to the crisis was to relaunch the title two weeks ago, with a bizarre editorial suggesting that people in Glasgow, Dundee and Aberdeen should buy their "local" morning paper. He is after the people who buy London-based dailies – seemingly unaware that the more the *Scotsman* plays down its Edinburgh connection, the more readers he will lose.

His most exciting innovation, following the example of the *Grauniad* and the *Times*, is a new supplement called S2. Or at least that was meant to be its title. On Monday, the day of the relaunch, it was actually called TS2 MONDAY. A day later, it had become T2 TUESDAY. "The S2 team," Neill declared proudly last week, "are from a different culture." Indeed: from the planet Brillo, perhaps?

Another culture shock has been the arrival of Rebecca Hardy, 34, who was until recently a showbiz writer on the *Daily Mail* in London. She is the fourth person to sit in the editor's chair in the four years since the Barclay twins bought Scotsman Publications and installed Neill as editor-in-chief (and, subsequently, publisher). The nominal editor Tim Luckhurst – who was confirmed in post only last month – has been signed off on long-term sick leave following hospitalisation for stress and is not expected to return.

A wallchart is necessary to follow the amazing turnover of staff in recent weeks, as people have either been sacked or walked out in protest at the ruination of their paper. The *Scotsman* is currently missing its editor (Luckhurst), deputy editor, three assistant editors, features editor, picture editor, arts editor, Weekend editor, crime correspondent, London correspondent, Brussels correspondent, environment correspondent and business editor, plus almost the entire complement of business staff.

The great mystery is how Neill has managed to persuade the Barclays that ceaseless staff purges are good for the health of the paper, as if *Scotsman* hacks were neanderthal printworkers in need of perpetual Wapping treatment. *UK Press Gazette* carries adverts for vacancies galore, but applicants may be put off by the fact some new recruits have either been sacked (eg assistant editor David Black, formerly of the *Sunday Times* and *Sindie*) or resigned (eg political editor Dean Nelson, formerly of the *Observer*) within weeks of their arrival.

Will the Barclay bros eventually realise that Brillo is a one-trick pony who has had a singular lack of success since his days at the *Sunday Times*? Have they already forgotten his triumphant "relaunch" of the *European* – which sank a few months later with the loss of all hands?

Ironically, one reason for the plummeting circulation of the *Scotsman* is Neill's habit of telling the Scottish parliament, local authorities and the Scots in general that they don't know how to run their affairs. If only they could all be such inspired – and consistent – leaders as Brillo.

At the end of the new-look paper's first week he wrote an editorial entitled "Repelling the English invaders", in which he criticised the feeble attempts of the tartan editions of London-based broadsheets to rival the magnificent *Scotsman*. This marked something of a turnaround for the man who two years ago complained in the *Spectator*: "The blethering classes [of the Scottish media] who dominate its columns and letters pages never miss a chance to put Britain down, to play up every imagined English slight to our Scottish sensitivities."

WORLD OF HYPE

PUBLIC Relations maestro Max Clifford appears to be losing his touch: at least two former clients have turned on him in recent months complaining that he has failed to deliver the service he promised.

Jonathan Penn, a con-man anxious to portray himself as a reputable businessman, paid Clifford £11,750 to persuade the *Mirror* not to print details of his crooked past, including a six-month jail sentence for fraud, and various other convictions. But even the great publicist himself was powerless to stop hacks Andrew Penman and Michael Greenwood dishing the dirt on Penn in their "Sorted" consumer column.

A furious Penn demanded his money back and threatened to wind up Clifford's company to recover the debt when he refused. But Clifford won a high court injunction to prevent this, while Penn was ordered to pay his £3,600 costs.

Clifford argued in court that he had in fact successfully protected Penn's reputation: "We have managed to keep other newspapers – by virtue of our close relationship with the editors – from bringing out further articles which would have revealed to an even wider audience your criminal convictions."

Perhaps Clifford is telling the truth about his friends in high places – the only newspaper to have reported the high court decision was, er, the *Mirror*.

Clifford has also made an enemy of Sloane-ranger environmentalist Birgit Cunningham, who shoved a chocolate éclair into agriculture minister Nick Brown's face at a farming conference in February. He still boasts that the stunt was his idea, despite Ms Cunningham's public declarations that the attack was spontaneous and that she did not contact Clifford until after the event when she was hounded by the press.

So well-respected is the word of Mighty Max, however, that even the Press Association published his merry little quip: "I told her if her target was white, a chocolate éclair would show up better than a custard cream."

In fact the only advice Clifford gave Ms Cunningham was the brilliant suggestion after the event that she should pose naked for the *Daily Star* with only an éclair for cover.

HACKWATCH

Beyond Their Ken

PAUL Routledge's predictions for the coming year, *Mirror*, 30 December 1999:

"In April, Gordon Brown announces that he is to marry Sarah Macaulay, but his hopes of overshadowing the Royal Baby due in Downing Street prove unfounded. Cherie has a daughter...

"May brings the London mayoralty contest to a shambling end. Fewer than half the electors turn out and an exhausted Dobbo staggers to the throne."

Charlie Whelan, *New Statesman*, 7 February:

"The Bet: Who will become the mayor of London? When Frank Dobson announced his intention to run for mayor, he was immediately installed as favourite with the bookies. Nothing that has happened since then has changed my opinion that Dobbo will win, but the bookies seem to think differently. They probably believe the hype surrounding Ken Livingstone. I don't."

Paul Routledge, *Mirror*, 21 February:

"Come on Ken, take it like a man. You lost...

"Ken's outrage is not justified. It is simply the pique of a disappointed man who has failed to get his heart's desire. Well, that's life... If Ken Livingstone decides to go it alone and stand as an Independent candidate, he will not win. He will simply divide the Labour vote and hand the mayoralty to Tory playboy Steve Norris."

Donald Macintyre, *Independent*, 22 February:

"A candidacy without the backing of the party might expose Mr Livingstone's relative solitariness as a politician... There is an assumption quite widely shared in private among the Labour hierarchy, that even after the heat of a campaign, Tory voters will cynically flock to Livingstone in large numbers if only as a means of discomforting Tony Blair. Perhaps. Such a tactic might appeal to a certain kind of sophisticated young metropolitan Tory. I may be proved spectacularly wrong but I somehow doubt that this will be the case... Mr Livingstone is formidable. But he is not invincible."

(Er, actually 24 per cent of Tory supporters voted for Livingstone.)

Joe Murphy, *Sunday Telegraph*, 27 February:

"Mr Livingstone is still pondering his threat to stand as an independent candidate in the mayoral contest in May... Yesterday, he was saying he would not be ready to announce his intentions for another week, fuelling speculation that he would, as a party official put it, 'bottle it...'

"The betting last night was that Mr Livingstone would stand down rather than risk political oblivion. The unequal struggle between the maverick and the party machine seemed to have borne out an old saying from the world of boxing: that a good big 'un will always beat a good little 'un."

Guardian, 10 March:

"A confident Steve Norris yesterday told Conservative supporters not to 'waste' their second preference vote in the election for mayor of London because he intends to beat Ken Livingstone in the second, decisive round.

"The Tory candidate based his optimism on what he called 'hovering pencil syndrome' in the polling booth: the hunch that, if Frank Dobson comes third and is eliminated on 4 May, both loyal Labour voters and Liberal Democrats will be found to have cast their second votes for Mr Norris rather than for the former GLC leader... 'If Ken does not win (outright) on the first ballot, Ken is dead. Is he going to get Labour second votes? You're kidding,' said Mr Norris."

Independent, 24 April:

"Mr Dobson insisted that he would 'keep battling away' and had not lost hope of overturning Mr Livingstone's lead – consistently running at more than 30 per cent in opinion polls – in the last 11 days of the campaign.

"He said the support registered for Mr Livingstone in the polls included an unusually high proportion of voters who were not fully committed to the former Greater London Council chief, and may change their minds or simply not turn out."

Peter Kellner, *Observer*, 30 April:

"On Thursday more than one million people will vote directly for Livingstone to run London."

(Er, actually 668,000 voted for Red Ken, plus another 109,000 who had him down as a second preference.)

IN THE TEAROOM

IN the good old days "new" Labour policy-making was a straightforward affair. You just sent Phillip Gould off on a rainy Friday night to some godforsaken housing estate in Dunstable with a six-pack of Diet coke and some crisps, and he'd phone through his focus group results before bedtime. Next morning they were in the draft manifesto.

Gould's been back on the scene in recent weeks – taking time out from helping his American chums elect Al Gore. But something terrible has happened to the focus group while he's been away. No one seems to know what they want anymore.

Take asylum-seekers, for example. One minute the carefully selected sample voters are saying that Hague is, if anything, too soft – "concentration camps are too good for them; the only thing these Romanian gyppos understand is a taste of the birch", etc. The next minute the *very same people* are saying that the phrase "bogus asylum seekers" is racist and food-vouchers are a typical example of Blairite control-freakery.

It's the same with pensions. The government's 75p is "derisory". But then they ask "why should young people have to shell out at all for these old gits who should have taken out private pension schemes while they were still working?" The same kind of contradictions are apparent across the whole gamut of policy – crime (tough, yes; limit trial by jury, no); transport (stop congestion, yes; high petrol prices, no).

Where on earth can the British people possibly have picked up this strange habit of political doublethink?

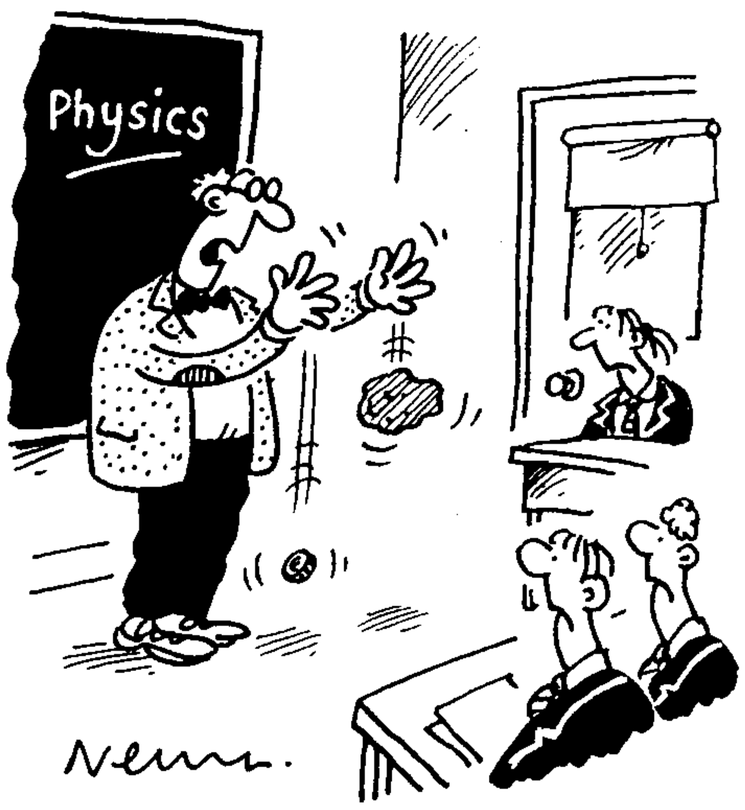
THERE is both good and bad news coming out of Number 10's post mortem on the local elections. The good news is that Peter Kilfoyle was wrong to bang on about needing to do something for Labour's core voters in the heartlands. The bad news is... there is no Labour core vote in the heartlands.

The old industrial proletariat just can't be arsed to vote at all these days, and nothing short of another 18 years of Tory punishment is likely to change that. Middle class, middle England remains the battleground. So how to woo them?

Step forward Mr Gould, this time arm in arm with Margarets Jay and Hodge. Soccer Moms are the hot thing in the US right now, so why not try it here? Moms become Mums for domestic consumption, and from now on every departmental wheeze has to get past Jay/Hodge maternal instinct test and be seen to contribute to the "feminization of policy".

Harriet Harman, who's long been clamouring to get back into the big time, is known to have done some work in this area and is spoken of in Downing Street with renewed respect.

'Urquhart'



"See how the Euro falls faster than the stone"

AS PART of the informed debate over repeal of section 28, a conference of the religious right whose members oppose the move was held in London's Regent's Park mosque on 9 May attended by such political worthies as Baronesses Young and Cox, Lord Nazir Ahmed and shadow secretary of state for international development Gary Streeter.

After Streeter had extended the good wishes of his leader William Hague to the conference, the organisers, the Muslim Education Co-ordinating Council, demonstrated its concern about teaching schoolchildren about homosexuality by staging a lesson of its own.

Dr Adel Abbas, a consultant microbiologist at University College Hospital, London, gave a detailed presentation on the, er, medical objections to homosexual acts. "God did not make the anus for sex," he declared, illustrating his point with a graphic slide show of the male genitalia and anal passage.

He acknowledged that anal sex does produce pleasurable feelings, but explained that Allah in His infinite wisdom had created this pleasure to encourage people to defecate. Dr Abbas claimed that otherwise people would become "permanently constipated".

No doubt Baroness Young made this very point to Stagecoach boss Brian Souter, organiser of the anti-repeal campaign in Scotland, when she met him in London a few days later.

"MILKING the system" is the charming phrase used by home office minister Barbara Roche to describe the role of what she calls "bogus asylum seekers".

Her salary, both as MP and minister, comes 100 percent from the state. Her husband Pat is a forceful barrister who does most of his well-paid work on legal aid. On any reckoning some 80 percent of the Roche family income comes from the state, then. But to suggest there is any "milking of the system" involved would of course be totally without foundation.

BRIAN DONOHOE, sensitive Labour MP for Cunninghame South in Ayrshire, was so incensed when he read a Commons early-day motion slightly critical of the London Eye ferris wheel that he put down an amendment full of praise for "the high-tech millennium wheel".

The wheel, he opined, would "provide a singularly spectacular view" not to mention "a magnetic draw for tourists in the capital". Moreover, "it adds to the London skyline as much drama as the Eiffel Tower does to the Paris skyline". Still not content, Mr Donohoe went on to commend the wheel's sponsors for guaranteeing that "safety comes first in delaying the opening to ensure that manufacturing difficulties with one mechanical component are replaced on all 32 capsules".

Mr Donohoe was no doubt hoping for a mention in the next *Eye*'s OBN awards, but instead he was shocked to read an item in the Scottish *Daily Record* which revealed that the Ayrshire MP had enjoyed two freebies paid for by British Airways, sponsors of the wheel. In 1994 he declared an interest in a flight to the US which was paid for by British Airways; and in June 1998 he was off to Paris for a world cup football match between Scotland and Brazil. BA paid again – and not just the fare. As Donohoe duly declared in the register of members' interests, it also paid for his match ticket and accommodation.

Unhappily for the *Record*, the way the story was edited appeared to suggest that Mr Donohoe had not properly declared his British Airways freebies, a shocking allegation. Mr Donohoe duly sued for libel – not just the *Record* but also the poor old Press Association and even Virgin Radio which copied out the *Record* allegation in the naïve belief that it was true. The sums paid out so far have been small by libel standards, and Mr Donohoe has donated them to charity. The *Record* has yet to settle.

THE following instructions to staff were noted in the Peers' Dining Room (PDR) at the Houses of Parliament the other day.

"All bills issued by PDR staff are our record of service. Missing bills create confusion and inaccurate figures. The following Peers tend to take tea bills away without paying.

"Please do not pass tea bills to those listed below: B. Cox, B. Flather, L. Graham of Edmonton, L. Levy, L. Stone of Blackheath, L. Longford. Thank you for your co-operation."

SCOTLAND's transport and environment minister Sarah Boyack showed no great enthusiasm when a member of the Scottish parliament (MSP) from her own party Johann Lamont (Glasgow Pollok, Lab) asked if she would meet his constituents to hear their concerns over the environmental impact of the stretch of the M77 built four years ago through the impoverished housing schemes of Pollok.

At question time in the Scottish parliament on 4 May she gave the equivocal reply: "I would be happy to explore, if it is appropriate, the possibility of officials from the development department engaging in dialogue with representatives of the community that Johann Lamont serves."

Conservative MSP Phil Gallie (Scotland South) then made a toadying tribute to the former Tory Scotland minister ("Does the minister agree that there were massive environmental benefits from the stretch of the M77 that was opened by Michael Forsyth?") before asking when construction of the next stretch of the A77 upgrading to motorway status would begin.

Boyack took positive pleasure in answering. "I am happy to give the commitment that we are continuing to progress with the M77, as requested by Phil Gallie and many members of the parliament." Surely this cannot be the same Sarah Boyack, town-planning specialist of Heriot-Watt University, who added her voice to the campaign against the M77 when it was in full swing in 1994, telling the *Scotsman* at the time: "Rather than giant new road schemes, we should be thinking about alternative transport strategies."

Members' Voluntary Winding Up

Resolution for Winding-Up

Companies Act 1985
Insolvency Act 1986
THE BLAIR CONSULTANCY LIMITED

Edinburgh Gazette

THERE have been concerns about pollution from the now-closed Capper Pass tin smelter on the banks of the River Humber for nearly 30 years. But some local politicians, such as John Prescott, the MP for Hull East, remain reticent about taking Rio Tinto Zinc, the owner, to task publicly.

The *Eye* first wrote about potential pollution from the plant in 1972 (*Eye* 269), and again in 1988 (*Eyes* 685 & 689) when it was revealed that a large cluster of cancers in the area might have been caused by radioactive emissions from the smelter.

Now around 200 former workers and locals are preparing a massive compensation claim for serious illnesses and material losses they allege were caused by pollution from the smelter.

On 5 June David Russell, senior regional solicitor for the T&GWU, will publish a report into the scandal as a prelude to legal proceedings against Rio Tinto. He has obtained documents showing that the smelter frequently exceeded agreed rates for disposing of arsenic waste into the Humber. During decommissioning in 1991, the National Rivers Authority noted one unauthorised discharge of 67 tonnes of arsenic waste.

This appears to be just the tip of a very noxious iceberg. In 1988-90 the health and safety executive (HSE) undertook a survey of Capper Pass and detailed serious breaches of the control of lead at work regulations 1980, the control of substances hazardous to health regulations 1988 and the ionising radiations regulations 1985.

On 10 May Capper Pass was the subject of an early-day motion: "That this house is gravely concerned to learn that London-based Rio Tinto, the largest mining company in the world, has made a series of false statements that during its operation of the Capper Pass Tin Smelter in Hull, it had fully complied with all environmental, health and safety regulations."

In June 1999 Rio Tinto wrote to the infinitely more helpful local MP Kevin McNamara (Hull North) stating that the smelter operated in compliance with the regulations at all times. In November 1999, however, the company admitted in another letter to McNamara that: "Contrary to our previous understanding, there were regulatory infringements at the site... Obviously, this is regrettable."

WITH membership collapsing and nerves frayed, Sedgefield Labour Party recently gathered to hear Tony Blair's long time agent and constituency secretary John Burton read the riot act.

The usually affable Burton had this to say to the stricken comrades: "As soon as these meetings finish, I always get reports of people running to the press. Will members please..."

MICHAEL HOLMES, former leader of the strife-torn UK Independence Party, has now resigned from the party altogether, taking more than 200 members with him.

In a "letter of resignation and explanation", he thunders indignantly about links between prominent members of UKIP and "far right organisations" such as the British National Party. "There is ample evidence to suggest *agents provocateurs* have been active in UKIP stirring up trouble," he declares. "Without doubt extremists have infiltrated. UKIP structures are incapable of preventing such things."

How odd. Last autumn a *Guardian* article made the very same allegations of infiltration by extremists and links with the BNP, adding that the party's rules seemed incapable of preventing such things. Whereupon Michael Holmes retained the services of our old friend Peter Carter-Fuck and fired off a letter to the *Grauniad* warning it that libel writs would be issued unless the paper apologised. (No apology was printed, but no writ arrived.)

Meanwhile Holmes's successor as leader is to be another member of the European parliament, Jeffrey Titford, 67, who previously belonged to the far-right New Britain Party. Can this by any chance be the same Jeffrey Titford who announced six months ago that Holmes should resign the leadership because "an MEP should not be leader of the UKIP"?

Fittingly, until his retirement Titford was a funeral director, so at least he should be able to give the party a decent burial.

'Backbiter'

"My goodness, Leylandi... how you've shot up!"

TUC NEWS

NO MORE serious charge can be made against a trade union branch than that of "misappropriating" union funds. Which is why the recent auditors' report into one of the biggest branches of the country's biggest union, Unison, reads so strangely.

The three auditors (Mrs P. Baugh; Mr I Hartup; and Mrs P Holland) have been trying to audit the accounts of the Blackpool, Wyre and Fylde health branch of the union, which has 2,850 members and an annual income of £55,801. But they report that they "have been prevented from completing their audits because of the failure of the branch secretary to supply the additional information required". There then follows a series of conclusions, including:

- 67 percent of the financial records for 1998 are "missing".
- Of 239 payments made, only 78 were supported by invoices.
- There is little if any need for cash payments, but £14,166 of a total spending of £41,806 was settled by cash.
- Building work had been carried out on the branch office, but "there did not appear to us to be fixtures and equipment approaching the value claimed in the accounts".
- According to the national auditor, a previous branch chair and the current branch secretary both bought cars out of branch funds. The cars are not accounted for in the branch accounts and the whereabouts of the second vehicle are unknown.
- The branch secretary occupies the first floor flat above the offices. Her rent, electricity rates and water bills have been paid out of branch funds. The branch secretary "clearly owes the branch thousands of pounds in arrears".

It would be hard to imagine a more devastating critique of the handling of branch funds. But up to now there has been a singular reluctance on behalf of the union hierarchy to deal firmly with the matter or to institute disciplinary proceedings.

FACT TO REMEMBER: The branch secretary at Blackpool, Ms Sandy Bell, is a member of the union's national executive committee and a member of its finance committee. She was a member of the campaign team for Dave Prentice, who recently fought and won the position of Unison's general-secretary.

TROUBLE for Unison of a different kind looms in Newcastle, where a lowly secretary, an Indian woman and a single mother, has complained about sexual and racial harassment.

She claims to have been kissed against her will by a senior manager for the union, despite making repeated attempts to be moved to another job. She complains that a similar complaint from a white secretary resulted in her instant removal to a different boss.

The aggrieved secretary also complains of inordinate delay by her own union, the T&GWU, to which she took her case. Both her claims were submitted late to an industrial tribunal, she alleges, with the result that her racial discrimination case was rejected. The sex case was allowed to proceed and could result in serious embarrassment for the union, which represents hundreds of thousands of low-paid workers, many of whom are black or Asian.

'Blackleg'

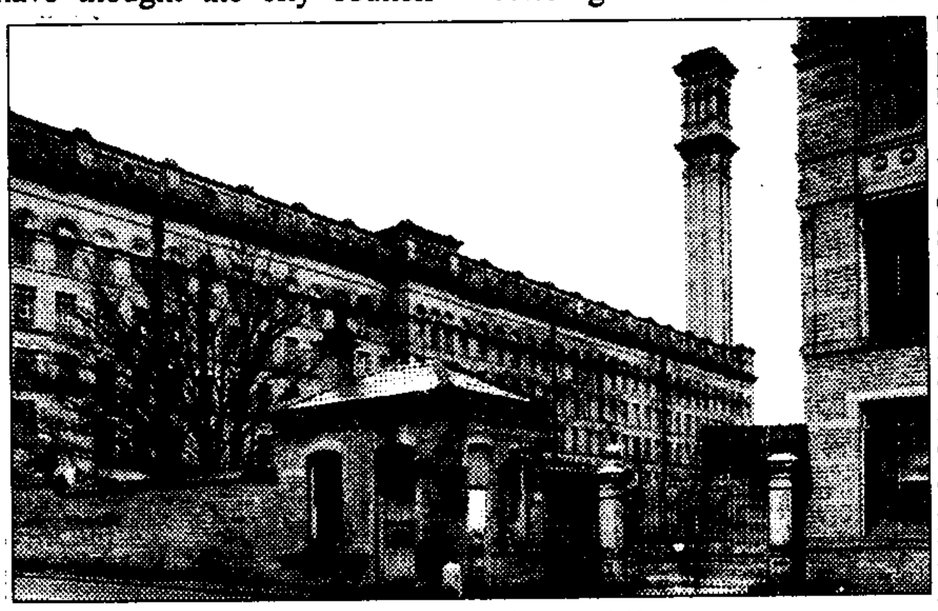
NOOKS and CORNERS

THE Manningham Mills near Lister Park in Bradford have to be seen to be believed. They comprise, indeed, one of the wonders of the Victorian Age — which is saying something.

Solidly constructed of stone and embellished with Italian Renaissance detail, they were designed by the Bradford architects Andrews & Pepper and built in 1871-73 for Samuel Cunliffe Lister, later Lord Marsham. In size Lister's silk mill succeeded in outstripping Sir Titus Salt's celebrated alpaca mill at nearby Saltaire: the Heaton Road frontage is 350 yards long and the buildings contained 16 acres of floor space. Most amazing of all is the 249 feet high chimney: a colossal Venetian campanile made of 8,000 tons of stone. Well might Lister have broken a bottle of champagne over the top when it was finished, naming it "Lister's Pride". The Manningham Mills show how the Victorians could temper the sublime austerity of the "Functional Tradition" with appropriate architectural treatment.

Lister's Mill was quite simply the biggest silk mill in the world when built. It was a supreme expression of the pride and wealth of Bradford, that brash and vigorous Yorkshire town that dared to invite John Ruskin to lecture — more than once — on the evils and responsibilities of the riches of industrialisation.

Well, you might have thought the city council would want to do something positive with these magnificent buildings. Poor old Bradford needs to exploit all the assets it has, after all. The old industry has collapsed; the city centre was buggered up by councillors and city engineers in the 1960s and, these days, while Leeds goes from strength to strength, Bradford is desolate.



But things can be done: there is the local example of Saltaire, where the late Jonathan Silver transformed Salt's Mill into the most vibrant and successful commercial and cultural enterprise in the area — now, with the surrounding model village, proposed as a world heritage site. And then there is the example of the Dean Clough Mill at Halifax, now full of small businesses. Surely it is recognised by anyone half sane that solidly constructed Victorian industrial buildings are a most valuable resource?

But that is not the way they do things in Bradford. At Manningham, only the weaving sheds are in use and the two colossal mill buildings have been standing empty for two decades. There was a project to use them to house the large and hidden Indian Collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum — very appropriate, given the large Asian population in Bradford — but nothing happened, of course. Then there was a development company which bought the mills and was going to convert them for mixed commercial use, but that enterprise is in the hands of the receiver. Now a new trust has been set up to try to do something.

Recently members of the trust — on which both community groups and Bradford city council are represented — approached Regeneration Through Heritage (RTH) for help in applying to both the Heritage Lottery Fund and English Heritage for grant aid to restore and reuse the Manningham Mills. However, members of RTH (an independent advisory body) were astonished to be told — by council officials — that for the last few years the empty mill buildings have been systematically looted. Almost every slate has been removed from the roof and many of the York stone floor slabs taken up.

This damage is not obvious from outside as the roofs are concealed by a high ornamental stone parapet. So how did the council officials know? And how could so much building material have been removed from a building which is meant to be sealed for security when there is a working police station right next door?

More to the point, why didn't Bradford city council try to stop this theft and vandalism to a listed building? It has the powers to do so, just as it has the power to serve a repairs notice on the (bankrupt) owner. Does it not realise that the Heritage Lottery Fund is not going to give public money to a body on which the local council is represented to replace stolen building materials worth hundreds of thousands of pounds when that same local council has failed to try and prevent this damage?

A vast structure which, a few years back, was in reasonable condition is now worth practically nothing as an asset. So unless Bradford city council is prepared to behave responsibly, enforce the law and to put some of its own money into the project, these superb buildings look doomed.

'Piloti'

"Sorry about this, we've got fleas!"

DOING THE ROUNDS

IN 17 MAY the Royal College of Surgeons launched a report called *Children's Surgery – A First Class Service*. The title, presumably borrowed from Labour's white paper *The NHS – A First Class Service*, hints at a future utopia rather than reflecting today's reality.

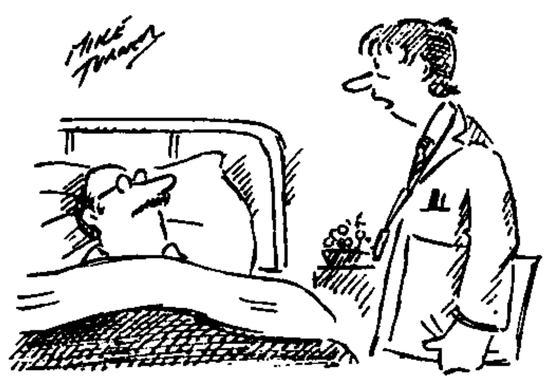
The report recommends long overdue changes in surgical training and professional attitudes, but the implication of labelling a service "first class" is that you can provide evidence to support your claim. Alas, evidence of anything is thin on the ground in the NHS. Say your child had a brain tumour. Could you find any published evidence anywhere in the UK that showed a particular surgical team was competent to remove it? No. Either neurosurgeons don't bother auditing their work or they don't feel like sharing it with patients.

In 1997 Ray Crisp's daughter Holly had an unsuccessful brain tumour removal at Great Ormond Street. She lost a lot of blood and Ray was told she would die. She didn't, but was still left with a large amount of tumour which surgeons again tried unsuccessfully to remove before telling Ray his daughter was inoperable and that the tumour would eventually kill her.

Ray refused to accept this and searched in vain for a UK centre that could provide evidence of its competence in removing brain tumours. The only published audit he could find was in America, and he sent copies of Holly's records and scans to a neurosurgeon called Patrick Kelly at the NYU Medical Centre in New York. Kelly had removed more than 5,500 brain tumours and his published results for 1,165 patients studied over 10 years showed a 1 percent mortality rate and complete removal of the tumour in more than 90 percent of cases.

He told Ray that he thought he could remove Holly's tumour and – after £40,000 had been raised for the trip – he operated successfully in April 1999. As Kelly put it: "Once we isolated it from its blood supply, it was pretty straightforward. Matter of fact, we took it out as a single piece and gave it to the pathologist."There may well be neurosurgeons in the UK who could also have removed the tumour, but in the current system there is no way to identify. This lack of information mystifies Kelly: "I don't think any surgeon should be scared of publishing their outcome figures unless they're not any good, but then if they're not any good, they should be in another line of work."

As M.D. has repeatedly pointed out, the only UK surgical centre publishing its figures is the heart surgery unit in Bristol, whose latest figures (April 1998-March 1999) for all baby and child surgery show just four deaths in 222 operations (1.8 percent). All the other UK child heart units have now at least agreed to collect and submit their figures for confidential audit, but this may not be made available to the public and may not go ahead at all if the government doesn't ring fence funding for it (*Eyes passim*).



"I do need that bed, Mr Robson, for me. I'm shattered after working 27 hours non-stop"

In the meantime we're expected to believe that a doctor's conscience will protect patients from poor performance and that swift action will be taken when and if it occurs. But by whom? The government's much trumpeted Commission for Health Improvement may see itself as independent, but if it reports to the NHS Executive the chances of action are minimal. In *Eye* 1000, M.D. highlighted the cases of two senior doctors, Peter Dawson and Anil Jain, who have both been persecuted for raising genuine concern about the quality of care in their hospitals. Their regional NHSE offices have been woefully ineffectual in investigating the problems.

Even when teams of outside medical experts are sent in to investigate allegations, they are not employed by an independent body and may not be perceived as truly independent. When concerns were raised about child heart surgery at the Royal Brompton hospital last year, the chief executive rightly arranged an external investigation which cleared the hospital of all charges of poor performance. Yet M.D. has recently met two senior consultants who still believe there were major problems at the Brompton that weren't uncovered by the inquiry.

It is unlikely the Royal College of Surgeons will ever push for an independent medical inspectorate, but at present they just have legislative control over surgical training. Again, there is a way to go before this can be perceived as first class. A consultant heart surgeon recently told me of two of his trainees he believes are not cut out for heart surgery (or indeed any surgery). One is taking him to a tribunal for sex discrimination and the other has been pushed sideways into thoracic surgery "where he will do less damage". We shall see...

M.D.

SIGNAL FAILURES

Focus on franchising

THE vision of a strategic rail authority (SRA) – the great hope for Britain's railways after the last general election – is fading fast.

Mike Grant, franchising director at the shadow SRA, has been comforting the rail industry and private financiers by saying his organisation is not there to "command and control". In other words, it will not try to unify a fragmented industry. So passengers can continue to enjoy a baffling variety of tickets and uncoordinated connections.

Grant's words neatly summarise the shadow SRA's approach to the renegotiation of franchises too – a process hugely diluted since shadow SRA chairman Sir Alastair Morton first promised that the worst performing train operators could expect an "exit pass" from the industry. By any of the main measures, that ruled out Virgin from any more franchises. Long-suffering commuters also expected Connex to lose its south-central franchise. Less than a year later, the six companies shortlisted for the first three franchises to be re-let include, er, Virgin and Connex.

The SRA, as it will become when the transport bill becomes law, is essentially the old pisspoor Office of rail franchising (Opraf) seemingly renamed to fool the public into believing that someone is at last taking overall control. Most of its staff came straight from Opraf, however, carrying a wealth of experience in choosing inappropriate franchisees.

In addition the treasury has failed to allocate the cash the shadow SRA would need to transform franchises, as Morton originally intended. It is giving about £200m less each year in subsidies and the rail companies are removing about £1bn in profits annually, with inevitable consequences on staffing, safety and overall quality. Big improvements like a sensible fares policy and regular ratcheting-up of the guaranteed minimum services would cause the bidders to demand more subsidy (or offer to pay lower premiums in some cases). The shadow SRA cannot afford quality rail services so the same old skinflints could be let in again – this time for up to 20 years instead of seven.

It gets worse. For the second batch of franchises the shadow SRA has chosen Connex for possible takeover of South West Trains and Trans Pennine Express. Also selected to bid for the latter franchise is Virgin.

Security firm Group 4 is in the frame for both those franchises and the Central Trains one. Nederlandse Spoorwegen, the state-owned Dutch rail operator, has been selected as another candidate for SWT. NS has an excellent record, but in an integrated transport system supported by long-term "control and command" strategies and appropriate funding. How well it could cope with British under-funding and vacillating political guidance is unproven.

The one company to have demonstrated that it *can* cope with such things, and even deliver modest improvements at the same time, is Britain's state-owned rail operator (which still exists in skeletal form). But British Rail is the only organisation in the world banned from bidding for rail franchises in Britain.

'Dr B Ching'

DOWN ON THE FARM

CONSIDERING how many billions of euros the European union (EU) pays out each year for Italian olive groves, Greek peaches and other delightful commodities which don't actually exist, it is good to know that at least in one area our masters in Brussels are determined to ensure that their subsidies are properly accounted for.

Their latest wheeze, with the eager assistance of the MAFFia, is designed to tighten up on payments under the beef special premium scheme, as Cumbrian farmer Jim Webster, that devoted chronicler of bureaucratic idiocy (see *Eyes passim*), recently experienced.

Under the old system any farmer claiming beef subsidies could occasionally expect a visit from a MAFFia inspector, who would come round to check a sample of eartag numbers of cattle claimed for against the official list. The farmer could round up the animals in advance, and the whole process usually took less than an hour to complete. Under the new system, the inspector must now in addition check the total number of male "bovines" on the farm to make sure this tallies with the farm's EU "cattle passports".

In theory this may not sound too arduous, but practice is a very different matter, as Mr Webster found when he was told on 27 April that the inspector would be calling at 9.30 the following morning. That evening Jim walked round his fields with binoculars, identified the eight animals the inspector wished to check and rounded them up in just a couple of hours.

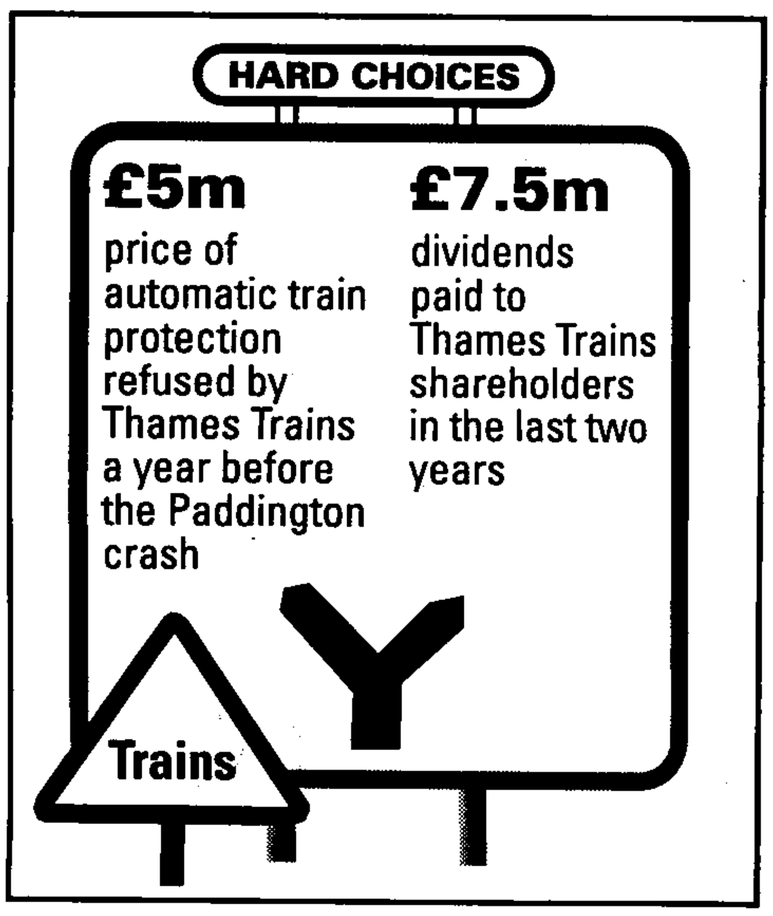
The fun began the next day when the inspector, Jim and his wife Brenda began trying to count the number of male animals among the total of 281 cattle of mixed gender on the farm. Despite all their efforts, they could not get the number quite to tally with the 105 males for which Jim had passports. As he puts it: "The EU had grossly underestimated the difficulty of peering under a milling sea of young stirks, still in shaggy winter coats and muck buttons dangling down, trying to work out whether a particular animal pees from one end or in the middle".

After four hours the inspector gave up, saying he would return the following Friday to inspect every animal on the farm as it walked through a crush. On the inspector's instructions, Brenda prepared for this by listing them all in numbered sequence (no mean task, since many had been bought in from different places, and their numbers were in no order).

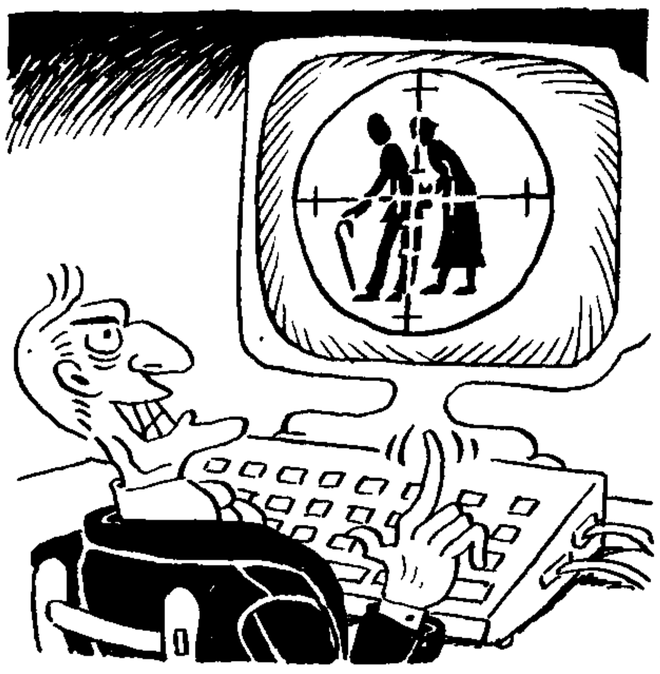
This took two more hours. When Friday came, the official, Jim, Brenda and their employee Paul began work at 9.30 and continued with only a short lunch break until 7pm that evening. When they broke off for the day, two animals were still missing, and it was only next morning that Jim and Brenda finally tracked them down after a further hour's search. With the inspection finally over, they could now work out just how much time all these efforts had cost them; knowing the MAFFia now officially concedes that a farmer's time can be costed at £12 an hour.

The inspection had taken 16.5 hours of Jim's time (£198) plus six hours of Brenda's (£72). Paul's wage cost had been £50.97 (in addition to which his nine and a half hour day had been in breach of the working time directive). The cost of the inspection had thus added up to £320.97: just to check out eight bullocks, all eventually found present and correct, and on which the beef premium payable amounted to £702. In other words, 40 percent of the worth of the subsidy had thus already been lost just in checking it was not being fraudulently claimed. Somehow one suspects similar measures are not being introduced to check on those Greek peaches and Italian olive groves.

'Even Newer Muckspreader'


HARD CHOICES
£5m
price of automatic train protection refused by Thames Trains a year before the Paddington crash
£7.5m
dividends paid to Thames Trains shareholders in the last two years
Trains

ROTTEN BOROUGHS



GREY POWER

WHO SAYS Labour doesn't look after pensioners? Those oldies who have received a mere 75p a week increase in the basic state pension should take heart from the case of David Brooks, chief executive of Labour-controlled Greenwich council.

Brooks is retiring in December at the age of 54 with a lump sum of £170,320 plus £56,773 a year — a mere £1,092 a week, give or take a few bob.

Last year he told councillors he did not wish to continue as chief executive. Greenwich had decided the job was going to change and there would be an increase in the chief exec's responsibilities with "new challenges" ahead, etc. Brooks felt the job should go to someone with different skills.

Fair enough. And because his length of service (36 years) and age (54) totalled more than 85, the imaginatively entitled "85-year rule" could be invoked, allowing him to retire early with a lump sum of £137,098 and an annual pension of £45,699. Brooks, alas, did not feel this was enough, so it was decided to let him retire early on "efficiency grounds", bump up his years of service from 35 to 40 and allow him to take an immediate lump sum of £154,650 and £51,550 per annum. Still not enough. So Brooks then received an immediate 11.2 percent pay increase, bringing his final year's salary to £114,659 and attracting the package detailed above.

Greenwich's finance and legal officers pointed out that it would be unlawful to give someone a pay rise simply to enhance their pension. So the council sought outside legal advice. Counsel decided it was perfectly OK to give the chief executive a rise (and the enhanced pension that goes with it) if the new salary were considered to be the rate for the job. So although it is not OK to give someone a big rise to enhance their pension, it is OK to give someone a big rise that enhances their pension, er, so long as the enhanced pension is not the reason for the rise. An admirable piece of commonsense, as any old person who is not chief executive of a Labour council will surely agree.

● **STAG NIGHT rowdies who wrought havoc in the sedate resort of Ventnor on the Isle of Wight numbered among their ringleaders the Isle of Wight council's influential property services manager, Tony Flower. Ventnor Rugby Club, of which Flower is secretary, was represented in force on a pub crawl that turned sour at The Rose pub in the town centre. When landlady Carol Westcott tried to remonstrate with the pissed-up hearties, Flower turned on her with a Michael Winner-style "Don't you know who I am?" Westcott has since lodged a formal complaint with the council, while Ventnor Licensees' Association has banned Flower from every pub in town, including his local in the neighbouring village of Niton. The association's rules allow for such a ban on anyone involved in "aggression, violence or threatening behaviour".**

CHANGING ROOMS SPECIAL

LAMBETH director of housing John Broomfield's insistence that fraud in the council's housing directorate is a thing of the past has been blown out of the water by one of his top neighbourhood managers, Richard Bascombe.

Manager of the high-profile Brixton Hill neighbourhood, Bascombe has admitted trying to diddle the council out of £100,000. The affair came to light after a subcontractor received payments for work on Bascombe's house in Cheam, Surrey, courtesy of Lambeth council. Puzzled why inner city Lambeth should be paying for a jacuzzi and steam bath to be installed in suburban Cheam, the builder contacted Inspector Knacker. The day after his arrest Bascombe admitted his wrongdoing but pleaded in his defence that what he had done was "rife" among council staff — he was simply fed up being left out.

Meanwhile Broomfield, in charge of what has been dubbed by "new" Labour as "London's fastest improving housing department", faces questions about what happened to the recommendations in a report by Price Waterhouse Coopers last July (revealed in *Eye* 984), which warned that the housing department was wide open to fraud.

● **MORE embarrassment for Leeds East MP George Mudie (*Eyes passim*), who has seen another protégé come a cropper. The city's principal youth officer, Chris Hart, a Labour party member and guest at Mudie's agreeable garden parties, has been suspended from duty pending an investigation by Inspector Knacker into allegations that £50,000 of council taxpayers' money has been paid over the past three years to a series of temporary but, alas, non-existent youth workers.**

RUSSELL'S REVENGE

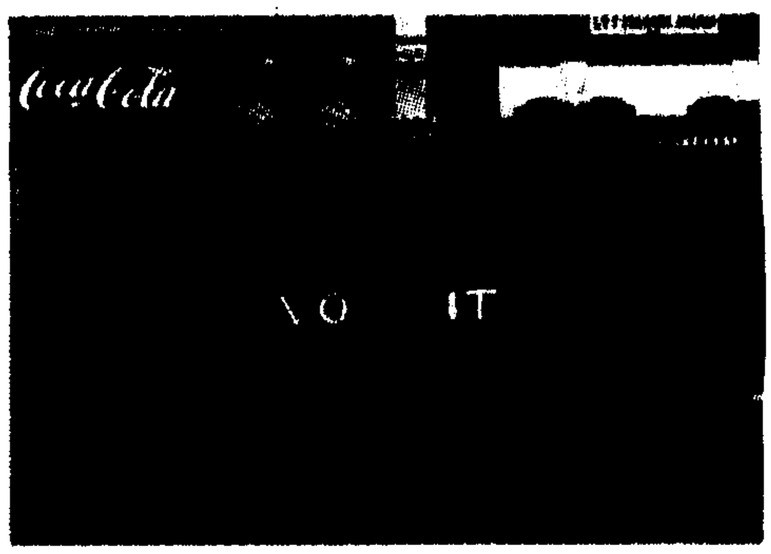
REVENGE is sour for Cardiff council leader Russell Goodway (*Eyes passim*), forced last month by the Welsh assembly to take a pay cut from £58,500 a year to £35,000 for a three-day week.

Two Labour councillors who had objected to Goodwage's huge wage, Rose Pearson and Cherry Short, have lost their jobs on the council executive and environmental scrutiny committee respectively to Goodwage cronies.

Many Labour members hoped Goodwage would attempt to mend the party's badly damaged image in Cardiff by encouraging a more inclusive approach in future. Alas, so many Labour councillors (29 out of 50) now depend on the hugely increased allowances awarded last year by the "independent" review panel that it is clear the "payroll vote" would not allow Goodwage to be generous to his opponents, even if he wanted to be.

GRAFFITI CORNER *Leyton*

Submitted by **Tyrel.**



ROSIES ARE RED-FACED

THE mayoral election in London was not the only one to go pear shaped for Blairite control freaks. After a purge of socialists from the party in Liverpool, "new" Labour managed to pull off its worst performance in 50 years under the dynamic Millbank-sponsored leadership of Gideon Ben-Tovim.

Many felt poetic justice was served on election night when former mayor Rosemary Cooper lost her council seat. Rosie's defection from the Lib Dems to Saint Tony's cause (*Eye* 976) was the subject of much spin last year. The sitting mayor, Joe Devaney, was deselected from his Netherley ward to make way for Cooper, but on 4 May the electorate of this "safe" Labour seat gave their verdict and dumped her.

● **IN THE beacon authority of sleaze, Donnygate watchers are monitoring the progress of freshly reelected Doncaster councillor John Quinn (see *Eye* 994) and likely cabinet member Danny Buckley, both of whom have attracted heavy betting on the likely direction of Inspector Knacker's next move.**

"And what do you do?"

Church News

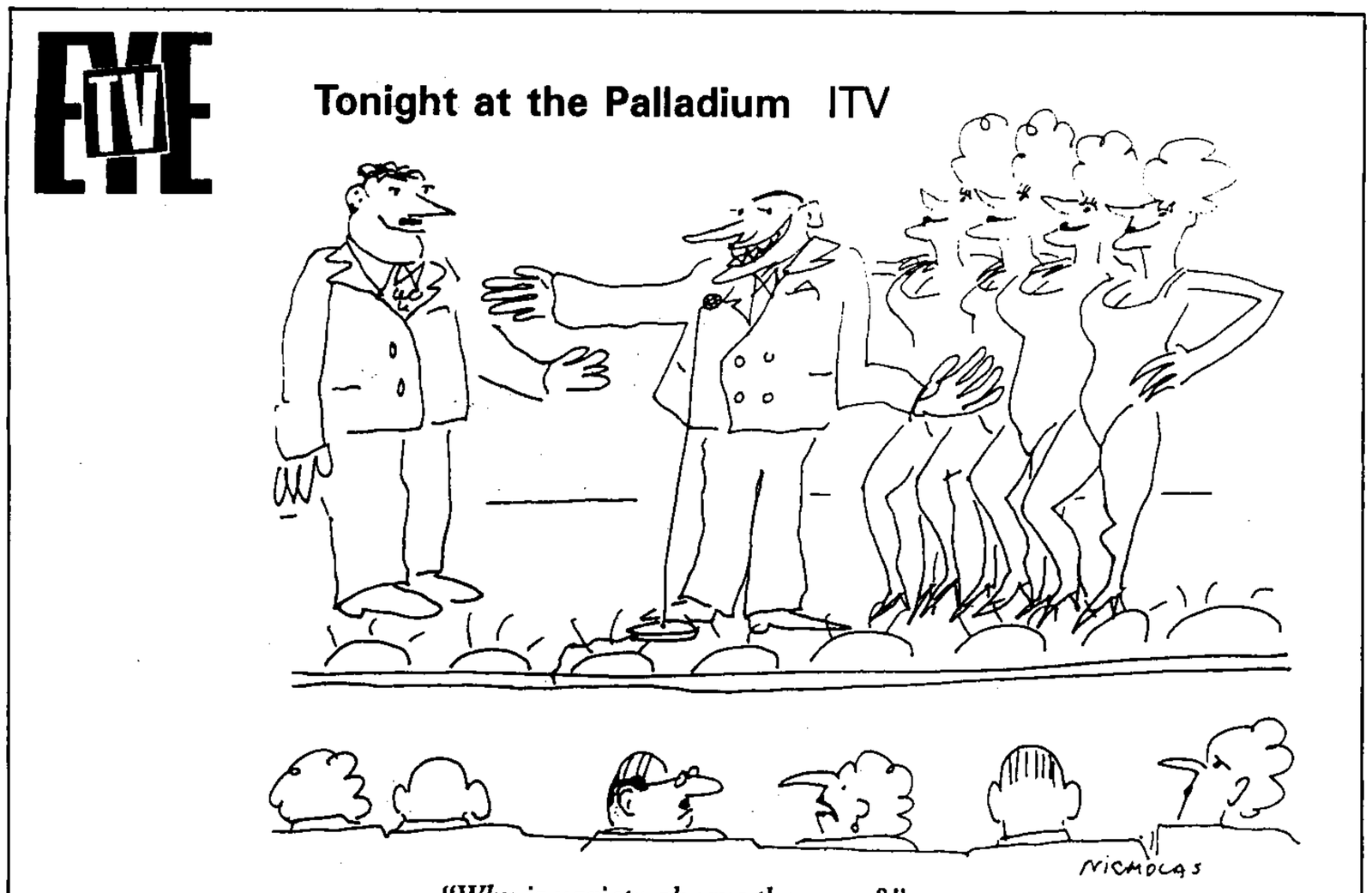
SATIRE often struggles to keep pace with reality, as the congregants of Westminster Abbey are the latest to discover.

Last year it was revealed that Dr Wesley Carr, the dean of Westminster, had enjoyed a £45,000 unsecured loan from the abbey funds. Shortly afterwards a spoof of the Westminster Abbey Bulletin, the PR department's self-congratulatory newsletter, did the rounds: it featured a letter from one "M. Muddleton" praising the dean's business acumen and general saintliness. In a PS, Mr Muddleton asked if he too might "borrow a few grand from the AbbWest Bank".

Lo and behold, as they say in ecclesiastical circles: the latest accounts show that the Rev Canon Michael Middleton, the man in charge of the abbey's finances, was last year the fortunate recipient of a £50,000 loan!

The accounts also record that the total put in the collecting plate at services was just £35,000 – barely more than half the equivalent figure for the previous year.

TURN AGAIN LIVINGSTONE!
OYEZ! KEN IS MAYOR OF LONDON!
HOLD ON CITIZENS! I'M NOT JUST A ONE MAN BAND!
I'M ABLY SUPPORTED BY... THINGUMMY... WHATSHERNAME... WHOHE... THINGAMIJIG...



"Why is variety always the same?"

MEDIA NEWS

ALL last year John Birt's admirers (*Who they? Ed.*) claimed that he would be given a plum new job as soon as he left the BBC – reorganising the NHS perhaps or helping Bill Gates run Microsoft.

Three months after his departure, what news? Headhunters from the private sector and the government haven't exactly been beating a path to his door. Nor has he made any discernible contribution to the House of Lords.

Has Birt suffered enough? Not nearly, to judge by this press release which has been circulated by disloyal ex-colleagues:

Former BBC director-general Lord Birt has landed a new job at one of Britain's most prestigious employers. He will be head of Aquatic Leisure and Hygiene Management at Croydon Borough Council's flagship New Street Pool and Baths.

He has already announced plans to rationalise the running of the leisure centre by dividing the main pool into two sections: one for advanced swimmers, one for learners. Unusually, the sections will not be horizontally but vertically separated. The advanced swimmers will be able to use the top section of the pool while the bottom three feet will be solely for the use of learners (see diagram).

Said Birt yesterday: "The plan has met some resistance. But dynamic thinking always does. In fact, this way of doing things makes perfect sense. If a learner swimmer gets into trouble, they are technically in shallower water.

After tackling the swimming zone issue, Birt plans to change the way in which the pool filtration system is managed. "In additon, focus groups have shown that 56 percent of customers urinate in the pool at some time during their visit. Why not turn this to our advantage? By the time I finish my job, I wish to leave behind me one big pool of piss."

WHAT has BBC director-general Greg Dyke achieved in his first 100 days? "Believe it or not a couple of things have actually happened," he announces in a first 100-days email to all staff.

There's a new staff bus service linking W1 and W12 and, with more than a whiff of Birtism, someone called Caroline Fairbairn, formerly Controller Corporate Strategy, has been appointed Director of Strategy. There's also news of a "radical" efficiency drive in Wales that should put the fear of God into hacks already struggling to cover this huge but neglected patch.

But as Dyke himself cheerily adds: "OK we've got the headlines, now where's the beef?" After all, expectations are high and the world has been waiting for Dyke's Big Vision for, well, 100 days now. Sadly there's no beef on the menu yet. It looks as if Dyke will keep quiet until he gives the McTaggart lecture in Edinburgh at the end of August ("I'll keep you informed as it takes shape") or perhaps even later, biding his time until this autumn's communications bill comes to pass. If so, what will the lavish internal communications department do with its time until then?

THE image of ITN news is suffering internally as much as externally, with staff dismayed that at a recent meeting Channel 4's director of programmes Tim Gardam told fellow executives the main aim of the *Channel 4 News* was "to make the government sick".

Meanwhile ITN is starting to regret offering a severance package to staff who are not prepared to shift to working nights as well as days. Managers predicted that around 20 employees would take up the option. Instead more than 50 have applied to leave rather than adopt the new regime leaving ITN with a £20m severance bill.

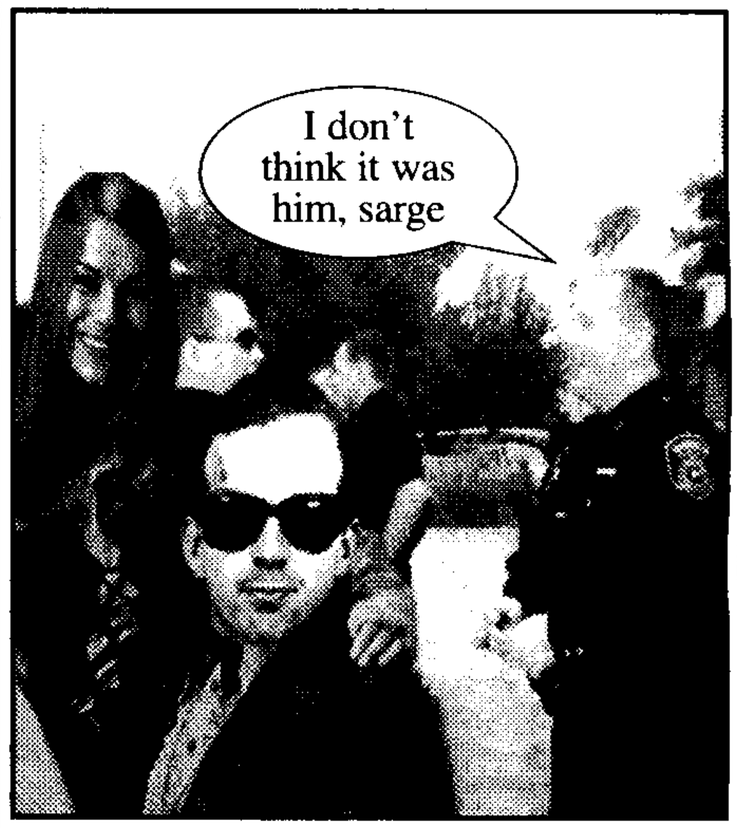
Those leaving include around seven out of 10 video editors from *Channel 4 News*, all of whom have been trained at vast expense to use the Quantel editing system. Very few people can use the system adopted by Channel 4 a couple of years ago, making it difficult to find freelances to replace those taking voluntary redundancy.

Too late in the day ITN has embarked on an internal PR campaign to regain staff goodwill. On 4 May Jon Snow, one of the few independent voices in the organisation, grilled ITN's chief executive Stuart Purvis on internal television. The interview went down quite well with staff, who feel that some of Snow's steel would not go amiss at ITN's radio arm, Independent Radio News (IRN).

On the day the London and Frankfurt stock exchanges merged IRN city editor Duncan Bartlett was told by his editor Dervil Fitzsimmons that on no account should he touch the story; she suggested he work on a story about horoscopes instead. Bartlett refused and the two had a stand up row.

SPLIT personalities

Bob Moore



Peters & Lee Harvey Oswald

THE sharp-sighted head of BBC local radio, Andy Griffee, was much taken by Radio Suffolk's "plough and seagull" logo during a visit to the station's Ipswich studio.

So taken was he with its appropriateness (it symbolises the county's agricultural and maritime heritage, geddit?) that he mused aloud that every local station should have a logo with a local identity.

Such vision, however, failed to impress his hosts. After all, each local station did have its own logo until three years ago when £3m was spent replacing them with a centralised "corporate" design. The sign Griffee so admired was an old one staff had forgotten to throw away.

● *Square Eyes is in Montreux*

Watchdog
WE FEEL WE SHOULD BRING TO THE PUBLIC'S ATTENTION...
A CASE WHERE PRICES ARE RISING...
AT THE SAME TIME CUTS IN QUALITY ARE BEING MADE...
WHILE MANAGERS SALARIES SOAR...
BUT WE WON'T
BBC WHITE CITY
wink!
Licence fee increase
Ken Pyne

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER

LOOK AT THIS, QUIN, AN ALADDIN'S CAVE OF VINTAGE PORNOGRAPHIC MAGAZINES
RETRO MAGAZINES & COMICS
I JUST LOVE THIS STUFF!
I CAN'T GET ENOUGH!
THESE ARE PRICELESS SOCIAL DOCUMENTS, RECORDING THE INTERIOR DESIGN MORES AND TASTES OF PREVIOUS GENERATIONS
CHECK OUT THIS VINYL COVERED THREE-PIECE SUITE, IT'S FABULOUS!
HOT
SKIRT
NOOKIE

WHY is Eamonn Holmes, Anthea Turner's former co-presenter on GMTV, so worried about her forthcoming autobiography?

Publisher Little Brown & Co has been amazed to receive a letter sent on Holmes's behalf by Messrs Schilling & Lom, adherents of the Carter-Ruck School of Media Relations. Having heard that Turner's book "may refer to our client", they helpfully "invite" the publisher to "submit to us a draft of the book so that we may check it for accuracy prior to its publication".

The letter adds that Holmes is a persistent plaintiff who "has taken a number of successful libel actions", and warns Turner's publisher to "avoid relying on newspaper articles as evidence of fact" since the appearance of a story in the press "does not mean it is true".

Little Brown has politely declined Schilling & Lom's kind "invitation".

LUVVIES

"In acting, you know, your job is to delve into the darker recesses of your insides – and I can get very dangerous," he blithely confides. "Many times you're messing with part of yourself that you should really have a licence to mess with. But I'm intrigued by it. I love the idea of going to those scary places."

PATRICK SWAYZE
Time Out

An occasional column devoted to gems from the acting profession. £10 paid for entries.

FRENCH football fans logging on to the BBC News website for coverage of the French cup clash between Calais and Nantes were left scratching their heads.

"President Mitterrand, who was present at this remarkable Stade de France clash, said: 'I'd say there are two winners – Nantes for the result, but also Calais for their spirit'."

Mitterrand of course knows all about spirit – having died some years ago.

STAFF at tiny Border Television – the subject of a bitter recent takeover battle between Scottish Radio Holdings and Capital Radio – are still reeling from the outcome.

When Capital announced its preferred bid, chief executive Paul Corley held a staff meeting and told the galley-slaves that "this is a wonderful offer". For him, it certainly is. Corley will walk away from the deal with more than £2m. Chairman James Graham will collect more than £3m, and managing director Peter Brownlow just under £2m.

What Corley neglected to add was that Capital would sell the television station to Granada as soon as the law allowed, keeping the group's radio interests for itself. Indeed, when asked by a Border journalist if such a deal existed he said that it didn't.

Surprise, surprise: just three days later Capital and Granada announced publicly that they would carve up the group between them.

While top managers count their loot, staff at Border – including many who have worked there for decades, since the days when its profits were barely in five figures – feel they'll be lucky to keep their jobs.

A BRIEF announcement in *Farmers' Weekly* from location-hunters Davis Meade and Partners reveals that "film makers are looking for three location sites urgently for this summer". Anyone with "a deserted farmhouse in the fens", preferably "with an orchard nearby", is begged to get in touch.

As it happens, Bleak House, the home of the jailed Norfolk farmer Tony Martin, is now deserted and has an orchard nearby – where Martin once shot at a scrumper. Could this by any chance be related to Messrs Davis Meade's urgent quest?

PR SOUL

I'm a very glamorous person. I love clothes, fashion, being in with the in-crowd. I see Orange as a reflection of me, of what I really love to do; being dynamic, on the front-line, being first, first, first with everything, the whole glamour bit.

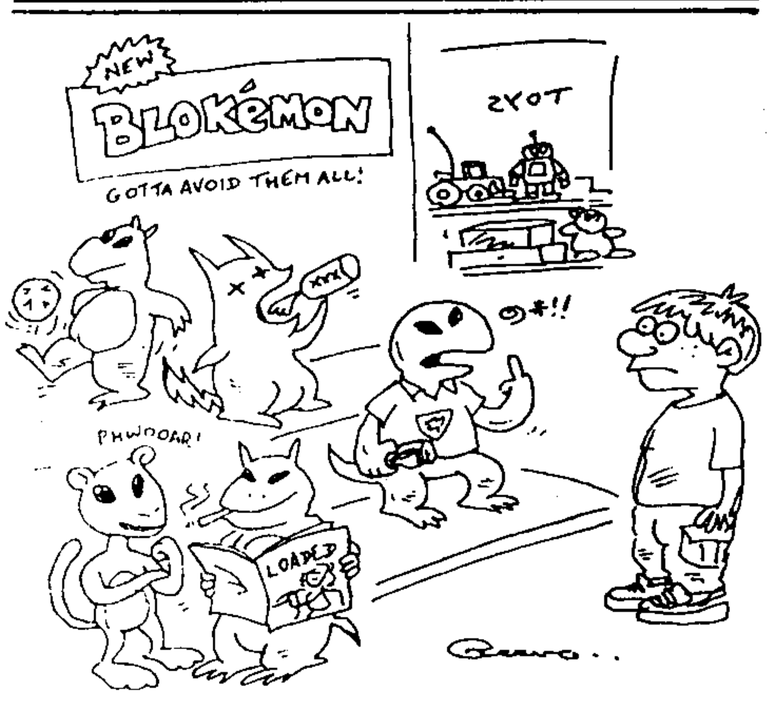
— ALISON PALMER,
Orange mobile phones PR head, *PR Week*, 5.5.00

ARTS NEWS

THE South Bank centre's newish chief executive Karsen Witt has wasted no time in ushering in the new Livingstone political era – albeit at the expense of the "workers".

Twitt has written to all resident and visiting orchestras, telling them that in future musicians will have to pay to park on the premises: very green. Londoners may soon therefore be entertained by the sight of tailcoated gents hefting double basses on to the Tube. But not, alas, Twitt, who keeps his reserved free parking space for his company car, as do all those overpaid conductors.

No doubt the parking charges will help offset losses at the enormously well-subsidised public arts centre. They are unlikely, however, to offset Twitt's magnificent salary of circa £250,000. The average orchestral player earns about 10 percent of that in a good year, without perks.



Pseuds Corner

There was an awful lot of bachelorhood to be swum through... Ardour dwindled. Three months, six months, 12 months, with the affairs tending to elide. Tina Brown, pointing to a lacuna in my emotional repertoire, would later say that I had never had my heart broken.

MARTIN AMIS
The Guardian

I used to be an old media junkie; I chose what I watched. Now, working in new media, what I absorb is ambient. New media = warp speed = blur = what's around me as I move at high speed. Sitting and reading is a luxury. Most of the messages and ideas I take in are in the air, off the street, in between the lines, on billboards, snatched conversations, subliminal messages – images, words, sounds and pixels in cyberspace, swirling around connecting in my head somewhere to produce some rough consomme of what's fresh...

"My next phase will be deep," I emailed a friend who was worried we talked too concisely.

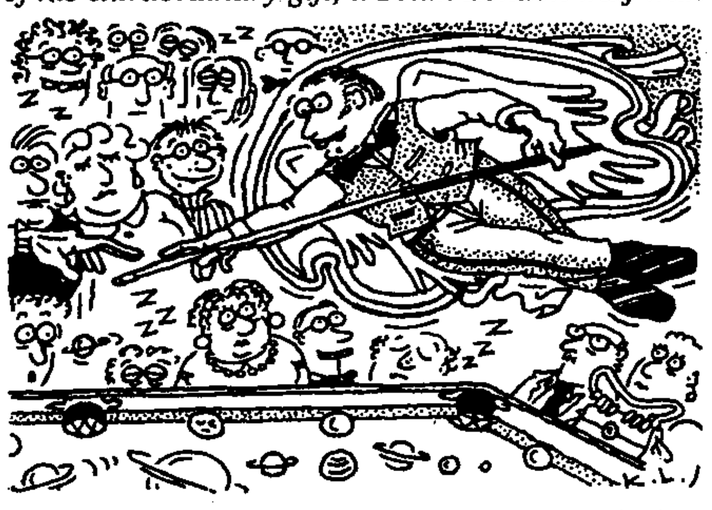
"Deep," he replied, "is the new shallow."

HILARY BURDEN
(Creative Director at beme.com)
Media Week

The next day is spent with Marc Quinn at his Clerkenwell studio, where he is planning to make plaster casts of Kate [Moss] that will be used to create an ice sculpture. "The ice will evaporate, rather than melt," he explains to her. "It's a perfect metaphor for our consumption of your beauty – as the ice evaporates, it will be released as vapour into the art gallery, and people will literally breathe you in. There's something Eucharistic about it."

Vogue

He [Jimmy White] is a man set apart by the nature of his extraordinary gift, a South London waif with



the hand of an angel, mind untouchable, locked in a world of colliding spheres.

SIMON BARNES
The Times

But why "Spoon"? "From childhood to adulthood you always use the spoon, from the minute you wake up to when you go to bed you have the spoon. It is a symbol of life," says Laurent Andre, who has worked with Ducasse over many years and will head up the London kitchen, in Ian Schrager's new Sanderson hotel. "It is a symbol of non-aggression, it is gracious, unlike a knife or fork which can be like a weapon. A spoon is delicate, gentle, for sharing. You take your spoon and you taste a little of this, a little of that, which is the concept of the restaurant."

The Times Magazine

In his novel *La Nausée*, Jean-Paul Sartre's protagonist Antoine Roquentin memorably describes his dislike of 3 o'clock in the afternoon. Three o'clock, he says, is always too late to start anything or too early to finish it. As Tony Blair passes the third anniversary of his election, he must be feeling much the same about his government.

RORY BREMNER
Sunday Times

CONTRIBUTORS: Steven Berkoff, Alastair Young, Elizabeth Day, Michael Parker, Ellen Delbourgo, A. Hack.

£10 paid for entries

Letters

Diss chord

Sir,

Re: Lottery News, 21 April 2000. Further to your article on the National Centre for Popular Music in Sheffield. For the record, Matthew Conduit is closely related to Lucifer, the board of trustees are collectively useless, amoral slime and your correspondent has his head up his northern arsehole. Meanwhile, I am not so tired after being made redundant in October 1999.

Yours luvvingly,
TIM "NO ONE IS INNOCENT – EXCEPT ME" STRICKLAND,

Via e-mail.

A Stern critic

Sir,

The Venerable Martin Williams asks in his letter (Eye 999) "What is the point of this inaccurate and malicious journalism?" The answer is, of course, that it is what those of us who regularly buy Private Eye want to read.

I was therefore distressed at the unprecedented accuracy of the first paragraph of your article on Bodo Hombach (Brussels Sprouts, same issue). But I will not be cancelling my subscription because, fortunately for you, the rest of the article meets your usual – inimitable – standards. Not only is it so utterly incorrect and confused that it would take an article of considerably greater length simply to set the record straight, as a special bonus it also manages to quote as a key source Stern magazine, that highly reliable journal of record which brought us the Hitler diaries. Your article unaccountably fails to point out that Stern has, in a subsequent edition, printed a retraction concerning its story about Bodo Hombach.

The other accusations and insinuations in your article are also rubbish. You have revealed yourselves yet again to be malicious and contemptible. So it looks like your circulation should be on the up then.

Yours faithfully,
ANDREW LEVI,

Special Co-ordinator of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe.

McCaned

Sir,

When the chips are down! It would seem that despite McCain Foods extraordinary efforts to create a standardised chip with the correct "fry colour" (Eye 1001) it is at the expense of taste. In a "taste test" in the Manchester Evening News of 5/5/00, McCain scored least of the 4 tested brands, with only 2 out of 5. "Bland" seemed to be the judges' conclusion!

Yours,
ANDY GLEDHILL,

Leeds.

VAT a disgrace

Sir,

Peter Warmington-Gardner (Eye 1001, VAT man and robbing) really should try to keep up. Perhaps someone could gently explain to him that VAT is a domestic tax (as are Excise duties). It is Customs duty which is collected on behalf of the EU. VAT is a major source of the government's revenue. Tax avoidance schemes just legally deprive the people of the UK of money which could be spent on education, hospitals, pensions, housing, defence, the environment, etc, etc. What's so patriotic about not making a contribution?

Yours faithfully,
"FINN BLUELINE",

Finchley.

Short and sweet

Sir,

Re: Virgin.
I told you so.

BRIAN BASHAM,

London WC1.

Lookalike

King

Ken

Sir,

Your splendid picture of Ken Livingstone acting in the St Albion's pantomime (Eye 1001, page 18) bears an uncanny resemblance to an even older picture of the 15th century King of Bohemia, George of Podebrady.

Since the doctrine of reincarnation has now been discredited at the highest level (ie, the Football Association) I can only conclude that Red Ken has blue blood in his veins. I think he should be told.

Yours sincerely,
NEIL SMITH,

Tyne and Wear.

Anagram

Sir,

As art-lovers await the new Saatchi exhibition "Ant Noises" — an amusing anagram of the first show "Sensation" — may I suggest a completion of the trinity: "Inane Toss".

Yours aye,
FRANCIS ELLIOTT,

Via e-mail.

Not so splendid isolation

Sir,

With reference to Hackwatch - Criminal Sentences (Eye 1001).

Quoting figures from the British Crime Survey which highlight the lower incidence of burglary in rural areas, as opposed to cities, does not really address the main concern of country dwellers. It is not the incidence of burglary in rural areas which is at issue, but rather the response time of the police. Many people in isolated areas are in fear of severe physical injury because they know criminals are well aware that the police will take at least 20 minutes to arrive. Perhaps Private Eye is right to attack newspapers who inflame public hysteria, but I do think it is wrong to trivialise the genuine concerns of vulnerable people by the use of quite spurious and irrelevant statistics.

The whole tone of this article seems to suggest that burglary is really only about the removal of material possessions – "stone garden ornaments taken"... "tricycle stolen from garage". If your writer cares to listen to people who have been the victims of burglaries, he/she will find that the most common feelings are of violation and that one can never really feel secure in a property which has been tainted by intrusion. Most of all there is the constant nagging feeling that the burglars will "be back".

Yours,
FRANK LEE,

Via e-mail.

"I'll thank you not to discuss our relationship in public"

Short shrift

Sir,

Re: Hackwatch, Criminal Sentences (Eye 1001). Not only did Fleet Street's "hang-'em-and-flog-'em" appeal court almost unanimously acquit Tony Martin. It instantly found persons unknown guilty of intimidating the jurors into coming to the wrong verdict.

The message coming from some of the tabloids was that juries in general are too easily intimidated and ought to be abolished.

I am currently researching a book on the jury system and I have interviewed over 200 people who have served as jurors in the United Kingdom.

Their testimony convinces me that, though juries may still face death by a thousand cuts (such as Jack Straw's ill-starred projected reforms), they remain one of the last bastions of common sense in British criminal justice. Out of any 12 jurors there are usually enough people of independent mind to come to the correct verdict, while resisting the most direct intimidation of all: bullying by strange old men in wigs and by fellow jurors.

I would like to hear from anyone who has been a juror – in the Tony Martin case or any other. No breach of jury law involved.

MARTIN SHORT,
5 Cannon Lane, London NW3 1EL.
martyshort@compuserve.com

Fitton of pique

Sir,

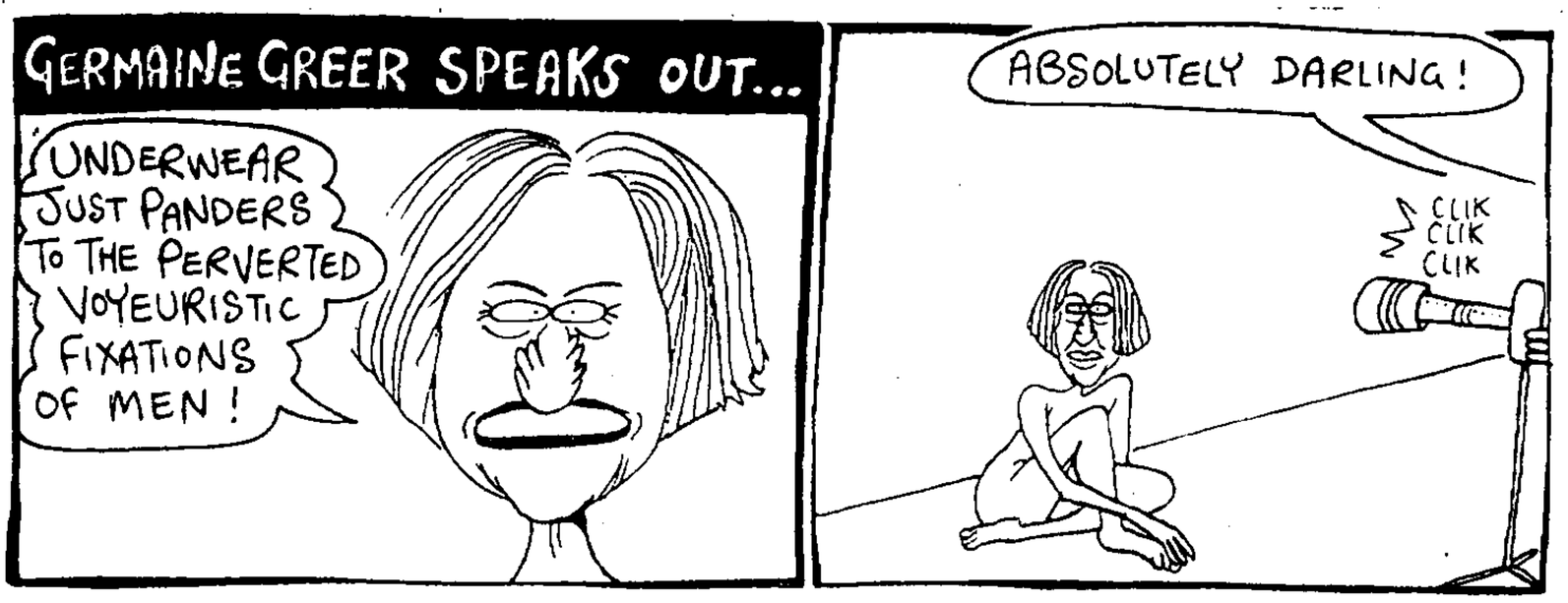
Agincourt happened in 1415 NOT 1413 (Eye 1000th issue). Your magazine is a national disgrace! Don't you check your facts? Didn't they teach history in schools 30 years ago?

Yours faithfully,
JOHN FITTON,

Greenford, Middlesex.

SUPERMODELS

KERBER


GERMAINE GREER SPEAKS OUT...
UNDERWEAR JUST PANDERS TO THE PERVERTED VOYEURISTIC FIXATIONS OF MEN!
ABSOLUTELY DARLING!
CLIK CLIK CLIK

I-SPY

Buckingham

Submitted by Mark Cole.

£10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No trans-parencies.)*

'Ad for it

Sir,

What a marvellous piss-take! Perhaps the best in issue 1001!

"The third millennium? This takes you to the fourth. Atmos du Millénaire..." (Some of us speak a little holiday French!) "Time magical and perpetual... imperially indicated... will make your descendants proud..."

(Love that... "Imperially indicated...")

Worthy of Pseuds Corner. And you chose to run it on a full page. Just as if it was an ad. And someone – "Jaeger-LeCoultre" apparently (brilliant!) – had paid for it.

Yours,
PETER STEVENS,

Via e-mail.

Lookalike

Dimmock

Brockovich

Sir,

Is buxom biopic babe Erin Brockovich related to buxom babybio babe Charlie Dimmock? I think Alan Titchmarsh should be told.

Sincerely,
JOHN DOCHERTY,

Paisley.

Choo-choo on this

Sir,

I am glad Dr B. Ching recalls Roald Dahl's Guide to Railway Safety, which I commissioned while at BR and which amused and educated millions of primary school children.

But the good doctor is mistaken in believing that the number of front-line staff has been cut by the new operators. There are now, in fact, 3,500 more of them on trains and stations than there were at the time the franchises were let.

The desire of operators to share out the costs of educating children to the dangers of railway trespass is not as money-grubbing as he implies. Local operators supply drivers because their depots are closest to the schools. But the potential benefits also accrue to long-distance passenger and freight operators using the same routes but lacking locally-based drivers to visit schools.

Yours faithfully,
IAN MacKELLAR,

Public Affairs Manager, Association of Train Operating Companies.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

DJ: *What creature squirts a smelly unpleasant fluid at its enemies?*
Contestant: *A snake.*
DJ: *No, I'll give you a clue – it's black and white.*
Contestant: *A bee.*
Capital Radio
(Catherine Marshall)

"We had a belief that we believed in..."
JAN MOLBY, Sky Sports
(Alasdair MacPherson)

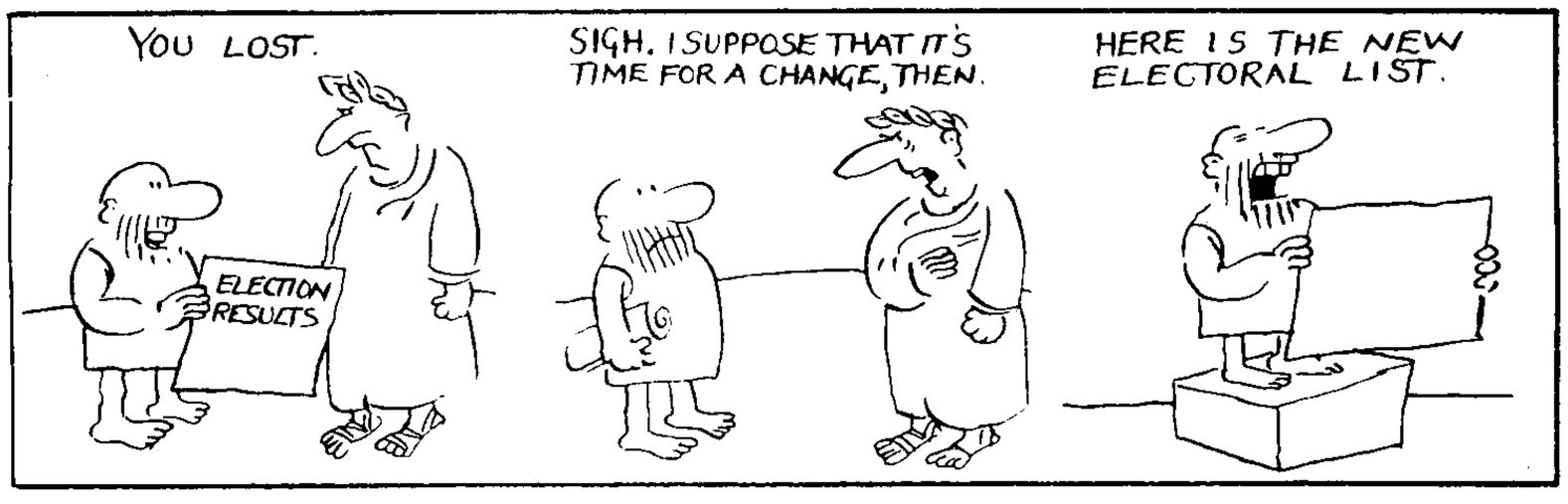
"...the problems at Wimbledon seem to be that the club has suffered a loss of complacency..."
JOE KINNEAR
(Richard Taunton)

"They've been out a long time; credit them for getting back so quickly."
DAVID FAIRCLOUGH, Radio 5 Live
(Stephen White)

"This is lap 26 which, unless I'm very much mistaken, is halfway through this 58-lap race..."
MURRAY WALKER, ITV
(Laura Watt)

HOM SAP

AUSTIN



Letter from Iran

from Our Own Correspondent

HERE in Tehran we have our own way of doing things. In your country, the removal vans would pull up outside 10 Downing Street after an election heralding great changes. But then you don't have to safeguard an Islamic revolution from an insidious invasion of foreign ideas and values. We do.

Take "democracy". Even us Islamic revolutionaries, derided by our enemies as conservatives, believe in elections. But let's be reasonable. We all know that real authority comes from God alone. Which is why we have Ayatollah Khamanei, our ageing Supreme Leader and spiritual ruler, to tell us what to do. And that is why our Council of Guardians – staunch fellows to a man (we'd never let a woman in, after all!) – recently ruled that the *Majlis*, our parliament, has no right to scrutinise any of the networks that report to the leader's office.

Quite right too. What business do elected, busybody politicians have poking their noses into the affairs of the armed forces, the security services or the *bonyads* – financial institutions that control perhaps as much as 50 percent of the economy? Really! Just because a bunch of "reformist" upstarts, who want to undo the great work we have done since the Shah was overthrown in 1979, managed to fool some gullible people and win our general elections back in February, some of them seem to think they now own the place.

OK, so some of our zealous lads went over the top when they shot Saeed Hajjarian, the man who masterminded the "reformists" election victory, through the head. But he had it coming. Quite apart from his politicking, he had been spilling too many beans about "the serial killings", a series of apparently unexplained deaths of jumped up intellectuals a couple of years ago. Thanks to people like Hajjarian, some of our top intelligence people were blamed. The minister even had to resign. More happily, however, Saeed Emami, the stout Islamic patriot who oversaw the operations, had the decency to commit suicide in prison by drinking hair remover rather than reveal the identities of his masters in high places.

We managed to nobble another of Hajjarian's treacherous journalistic chums, Akbar Ganji, just by getting the courts to arrest him and put him in prison. His so-called "exposés" about the serial killings had been getting a bit much. He was also harping on about the role of our former president, Hashemi Rafsanjani, who was our front-runner in the elections but came in 30th out of 30 in the Tehran poll because of people like Ganji.

We have detained the already unwell journalist with a bunch of junkies and Aids victims. Should he survive we might one day get round to putting him on trial for something. In fact the courts have been unusually busy of late. With their help, we have managed to jail quite a number of irritating journalists. We have also succeeded in shutting down more than a dozen "reformist" newspapers after the leader rightly denounced them as foreign bases.

A whole bunch of people who had the gall to attend an apparently innocent conference abroad, which we know only too well would contribute to the spread of your decadent western values, are up before the beak too. In among them was Jamileh Kadivar. So what if she came second in the Tehran poll? She is the wife of the culture and guidance minister, Mohajerani, who is one of our big targets. He is a right-hand man of that dubious president, Muhammad Khatami, who was elected last year and threatens to dismantle our divinely ordained grip on power.

We cannot yet go for Khatami himself because he is, unfortunately, still quite popular. But we are doing what we can. The good old Guardians managed to disqualify quite a lot of his chums who won seats in the elections. They also insisted on recounting the Tehran votes over and over – they are still at it now, nearly three months later! And even if the "reformists" do finally take over the *Majlis* at the end of the month, the Guardians will still be there to block any legislation we don't like.

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

● **"Bangkokians are very proud of the Skytrain system," Chatchada Chantorn, a 17-year-old student at Ratchavinit Bangkaew Girls School told reporters, "and rightly so, because it has made travel fast and convenient. But there is one serious drawback. Passengers have to climb steep stairs to reach the elevated platform, and that has made women a prime target for voyeurs.**

"The stairs have clearly been designed by a pervert and a molester. There are large gaps between each step, and they are so far apart that women have to open their legs wide to get up. The city officials have all set up their booths under these flights of stairs, and I've seen them spending all day leching at unsuspecting women as they are climbing. I climb very carefully with my hands clenching my skirt to avoid exposing anything, but many women do not realise how visible they are. I've seen dozens of men ogling women as they walk up the stairs, and the tuk-tuk drivers all cluster beneath them during their breaks, placing bets with their friends over I know not what."

Police Captain Panom Chuathong replied by telling women "just report the crime to us, and we will rush to the scene and detain the suspects immediately. They will not go unpunished. They will be fined severely." But the press conference descended into chaos when Ms Chantorn pointed out that the police were among the worst offenders, and that many police booths had also been positioned beneath the stairs at Skytrain stations. *(Bangkok Post, 17/1/00. Spotter: Terry White)*

—●—

● "Because it was his birthday, Duta Liviu offered to drive five of his friends from Pitesti to Bucharest in his BMW to celebrate in a restaurant," Allna Grigoras explained to readers of his Romanian newspaper column. "After work, they all set off along the Pitesti to Bucharest highway, which runs over the Sabar River.

"What they did not realise was that, due to financial problems, the bridge across the river has still only been completed on the Bucharest to Pitesti side. On the other side, there is a gap of 180 metres, so traffic heading east has to cross over and go the wrong way along the westbound lane. There are supposed to be signs to tell drivers about this, but the construction workers often change the driving directions without marking them, or they start repairing the bridge and forget to update the signs.

"On the night in question, Mr Liviu and his friends were in high spirits as they drove towards Bucharest. They even called another friend on their mobile phone, and began singing Eurovision song contest hits to him. But when they reached the bridge, no signs had been put out to warn them that there was a gap in the road. Consequently, the car reached the unfinished part of the bridge, shot straight off the end, and plummeted 400 metres into the river, killing all six people instantly. The friend heard the singing suddenly stop, then a moment's silence, followed by a scream. Then the phone went dead.

"The fault was clearly very much the driver's, because he was driving at 120 miles per hour, but the fact cannot be ignored that over fifty people have now died during the past five years by accidentally driving off the end of this road and into the river, and workmen really should be more vigilant about ensuring that the correct warning signs are in place." *(Bucharest Daily News, 11/4/00. Spotter: Phelim McAleer)*

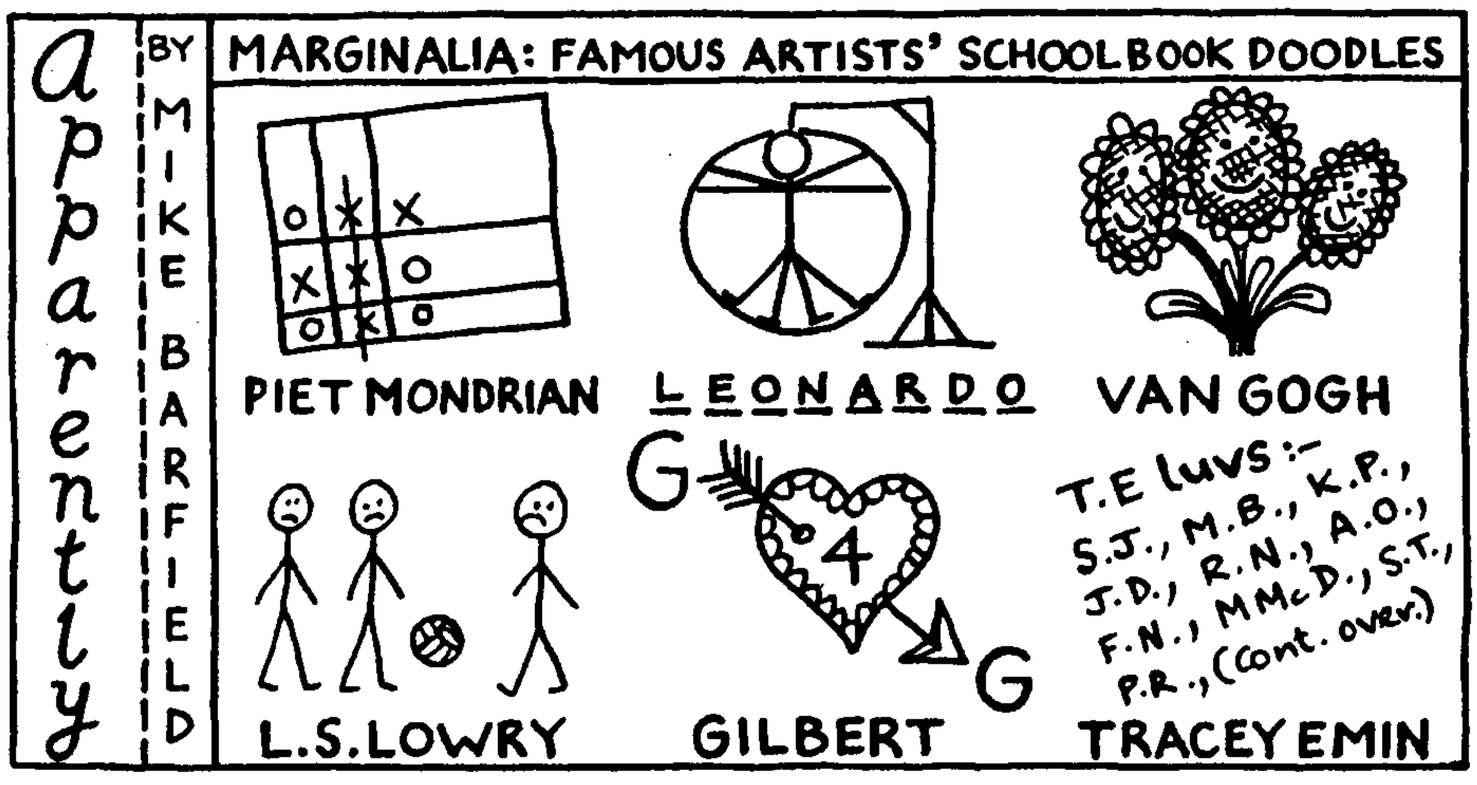
—●—

● *"Sir, In the 19th century, the explosion of Britain's urban population led to a vigorous controversy about the lack of land for cemeteries and the introduction, in the face of fierce opposition from 'resurrectionists', of cremation. Times have changed, and now the opposition is to cremation itself as a source of gases contributing to global warming and a waste of good protein.*

"I am working with the pet food industry to introduce legislation to enable people, at the end of their lives, to donate their bodies to pet food

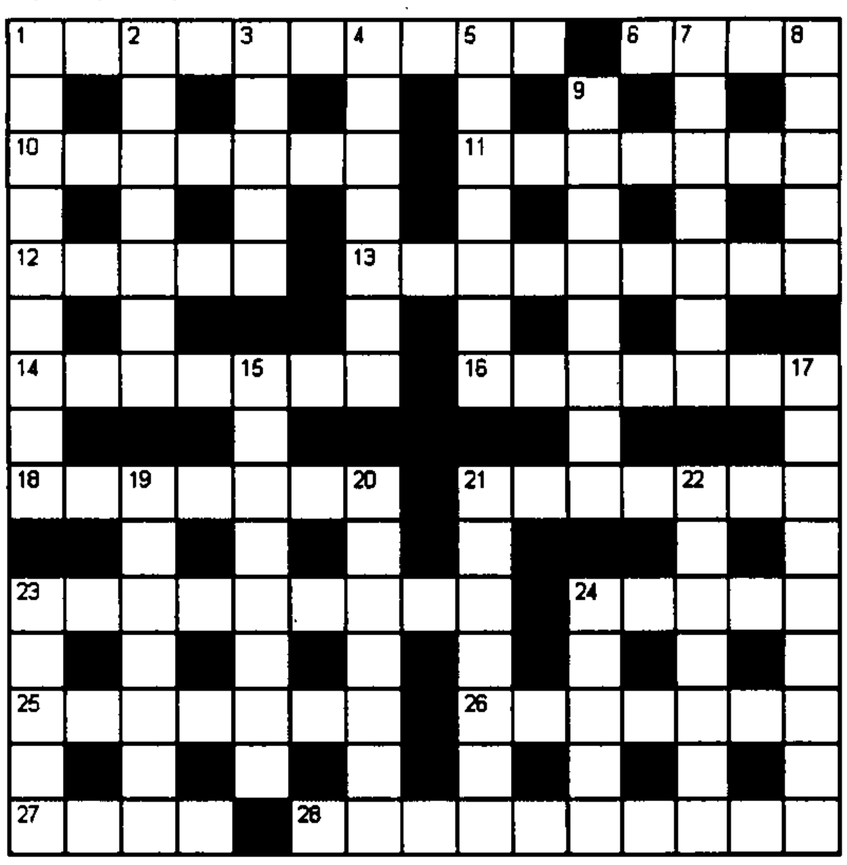
manufacturers. The human flesh thereby recycled will release thousands of tonnes of grain, at present used in pet foods, for feeding less fortunate children elsewhere in the world. It is right that the British, with their love of animals, should set the rest of the world an example. If any of your readers would like to write to me, I will send them a draft clause for inclusion in their will, and a 'Pet-meat' donor card to carry in their wallet or handbag.

"Dennis Woodman, Kew, Surrey." (New Scientist, 15/4/00. Spotter: Pete Riches)



EYE CROSSWORD 157

by Cyclops *£100 prize*



ACROSS

1 Description of Blair: the fab Tony, er, missing New York's excitement (6-2-2)
6 Attempt to reverse nuts (4)
10 Presidential candidate and First Lady left spouse initially to show qualifications (1-6)
11 Organ held by tear-arse (4,3)
12 Gutless Hague, note, takes 'right' to be 'centre' (5)
13 Putting on a show is what gets Bill through (9)
14 'Sly' uses surgery – novel! (7)
16 Expected hostage to appear in commercial (7)
18 Active lovers' nuts (7)
21 Earth's unavailable – goes elsewhere (4,3)
23 Put American Jew in short skirt and he'll become a fascist (9)
24 PC language but without frills (5)
25 Tip: dual screwing can give you clap (7)
26 Brown, single, hugging a politician – they get resoundingly beaten (7)
27 Piss right on a member of the House? (4)
28 She finally went topless – Benny alone excited (4,6)

DOWN

1 It can be most illuminating to reveal yourself to Lily, for instance (5,4)
2 The ones concealing criminal charge get the treatment (7)
3 Up before court (5)
4 So rest's impossible for those who risk losing their sight (7)
5/9 'Lady in Pink', the romantic fictional dictator (7,8)
7 He let off Foot and what Foot represented? (3,4)
8 Wait at end of street in which members, etc. get cleaned up (5)
9 (see 5)
15 Hormones, for example tire sods out! (8)
17 Backsliding gets D of E, etc. in mess (9)
19 One's flipped over kinky Tessa, the old pro (7)
20 Bob needs manual protection, being infatuated with somebody (7)
21 Hawking comes up with this: 'Depth of earth + Time over Length gets Earth' (7)
22 Clinton's "Ta, Gennifer" not entirely giving a performance (2,5)
23 Clean politician has nothing to hide before a judge (3,2)
24 Doesn't she have much up top? Yes and no (5)

£100 prize to first solution opened on 26.5.00. Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1V 5RG.

Solution to Crossword No. 156

Winner: JOHN McWILLIAMS

ACROSS: 1/13/14 ac. Just a twinkle in your father's eye 8 Ambition 9 Regain 10 St Paul 11 Agree to 13 (see 1ac.) 14 (see 1 ac.) 16 Adulterous 18 Talk 19 Supremo 21 Soweto 24 Titles 25 Brasilia 26 National Health.

DOWN: 1 James Bond 2 Skipper 3 Adieu 4 Wino 5 No regrets 6 Legless 7 Idiot 12 Stool 14 Freemason 15 Yellowish 17 Lorelei 18 The pill 20 Unita 22 Orate 23 Abel.

TRIPOLI TIMES
19 May 2000

Should Gadaffi Do Business With This Evil Man?

by Our Political Staff **Libya Purvis**

THERE WAS outrage in Libya tonight at the news that one of the world's most respected statesmen is to form a business relationship with the world's most hated dictator.

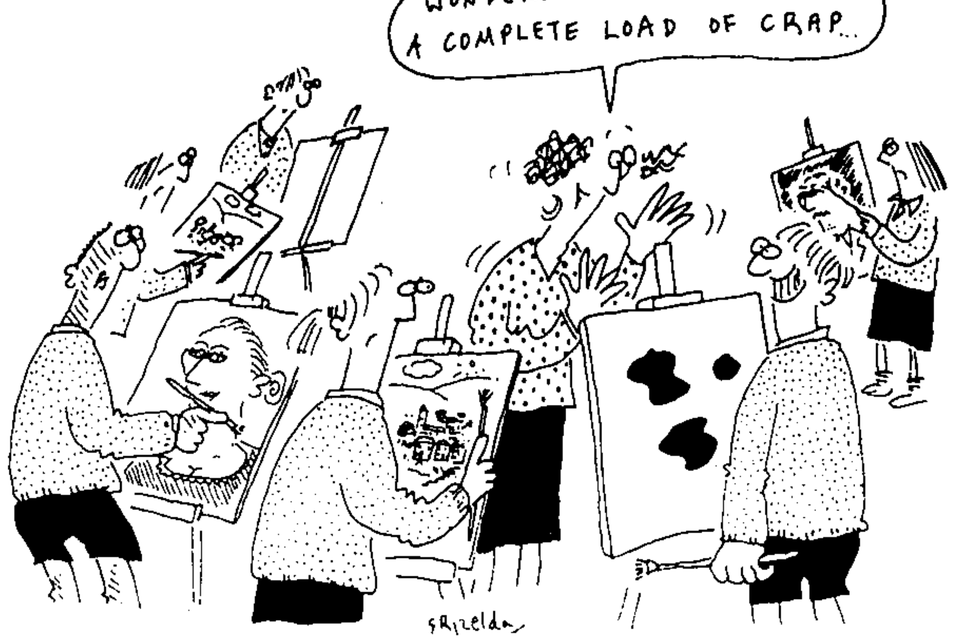
He is Mohamed Al Fayed, or The Fugger as he is known to international police forces, and he is responsible for an appalling catalogue of crime. Not only was Fayed's organisation responsible for the drunk driver who killed the late Princess of Wales, but Fayed has admitted personally planting dangerous money in the pockets of leading Conservative politicians, which destroyed the entire government of Great Britain in the 1990s.

But last night the Libyan leader defended his new ally. "Mr Al Fayed is a fine English gentleman. He is going to bring prosperity to Libya by his new revolutionary building technique.

Fugg of War

"Mr Fayed will create an entire leisure complex of resorts, hotels and nightclubs using only millions of unsold copies of the humorous magazine Punch."

On other pages
Your Camel Trains Tonight 3
Lyn Ali Barber Interview 4
Unfunny cartoon by Bom 94



HUGH GRANT TO STAR AS FIGHTER ACE

What You Won't See On The BBC

That Queen Mother's 100th Birthday Pageant In Full

(Directed by Prince Edward and sponsored by Powergen)

12.00 Midday 100 Gun Salute by the 1st Battery of the Queen's Own Turf Accountants.

12.30 March past of the Loyal Beefeaters Gin Representatives.

1.00 Dame Vera Lynn sings medley of Queen Mother favourites, including "Ten Green Bottles", "The Kempton Races" and "Don't Put Your Daughter On The Throne, Mrs Bowes-Lyons".

1.30-4.00 Afternoon nap.

4.00 Racing from Uttoxeter on Channel 4 *(That's enough Royal Pageant. Ed.)*

PROTEST AS QUESTION TIME 'DUMBS DOWN'

by Our Media Staff **Lois Common-Denominator**

CRITICS of the BBC were furious last night at the invitation of "Boy" Charles to appear on the prestigious current affairs programme "Question Time".

Said one, "What on earth was a politician doing on this programme amidst all the heavyweight figures from the world of entertainment?

"Boy Charles," continued the critic, "was out of his depth with guests like George O'Dowd on the show. And who cares what he thinks about the Euro compared to panellists like Joanna Lumley, Ant and Dec or Graham Norton?" *(Cont'd. p. 94)*

Charles Moore takes a wry, sideways weekend look at the problems of buying coffee in Canary Wharf

TO THOSE of us who need an early morning beverage the advent of the new-style coffee emporia from the United States has brought a bewildering variety of choice. Whereas in former days one simply asked one's fag or mater to procure "an cup of coffee", one now has to request from the vendor a frighteningly accurate description of the precise quantity, style and ingredients of the desired brew – or face humiliation from the knowing employees of Mr Starbuck!

Thus, when I ordered "a smallish white frothy coffee with no whipped cream to take away in one of those cardboard beakers with a top, my good man", I was amazed when the young fellow behind the counter responded by laughing uncontrollably and pointing to the menu where the mysterious words "Short latte to go" were inscribed in *(cont. p. 94)*

NEW-LOOK KEN AND NEW-LOOK QUEEN

Eye Poll: Should Ken replace the Duke of Edinburgh?

ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hi!

And a bit of a depressing week it's been, to be frank (and when I say "frank", you know who I mean!).

Do you know how many people turned out for our May Day Flower Festival and Songs of Praise?

I will tell you. Just four! And that represents only 0.005 percent of the parish register.

And I think I know the reason why some people in the parish have not been quite as supportive lately as they should have been!

It's all to do with cynicism, which comes from two Greek words "sin" and "schism".

And that's what it means. The sin of setting yourself up as separate from the right and true way of doing things!

A cynic is someone who may be jolly clever, but who, deep down, doesn't believe in anything.

We all know people like that, don't we? People who go on about how much better things were in the old days. Or people who pretend that poor people need help and that rich people should have all their money taken away from them.

Well, that is just the sort of thinking that I've been trying to change in my three years here at St Albion's.

As it says in the New Labour Bible, "For he has kept the mighty in their seats, and the poor he hath sent empty away" *(Gospel according to St Luke Johnson)*.

That's the Third Way I've been trying to put across. That's what I believe in.

But what do the cynics believe in? Nothing! It's just knock, knock, knock, all the time!

Frankly (no, not him!) I'd rather

have young William Hague, who at least believes all that nonsense he talks in our Sixth Form Debating Society, even if everything he says is completely wrong!*

So, let's make this our message for the rest of this Millennium Year.

It's not just the forces of conservatism we have to fight, but the equally powerful and destructive forces of cynicism.

Our job is to go out into the parish and spread the good news! As we sing in the moving chorus I wrote for last week's third anniversary evensong:

"We've done a lot
But there's much left to do
So let's not blame Tony
If we're feeling kinda blue."

Yours,

Tony

*Young William did not win the debate last week, by the way, even though it might have helped if some of the PCC had briefed me a little better beforehand on some of the trickier points he raised!

Hats off to Cherie as she wins the Boy George lookalike competition at the May Day Flower Festival!

To Remember In Your Prayers

● Mr Dobson, whom I hope is not feeling too low after letting everyone down so badly in the pantomime. May he come to realise that his prospects of future service in the parish are now nil after such a lamentable performance! Help him to go off into the wilderness with grace and dignity, and never to be heard of again! T.B.

Millennium Tent Update

From Jean-Claude Gerbil

Mes amis,

Je suis un peu desperate. Personne, mais PERSONNE, ne vient to the Tent over les trois recent Banque Holidays. Pourquoi? je demande. Après tout, c'était completely free pour les enfants, et aussi pour leurs parents. Peut-être c'est le "wrong kind of tent", comme vous dites en Angleterre, n'est-ce pas? Now, j'ai une idée très brilliante pour attracter les missing millions.

Si vous visitez le tent nous payer vous 100 euros per personne (6p). Puis-je dire fairer que ça, squire?

Rollez-up punteurs pour l'experience d'un lifetime. J.C.G.

Notices

The vicar is shortly to take his paternity leave, which is not paternity leave at all, but a relaxed holiday period in which he will still be available to run the country as well as change the odd nanny *(Is this right? A.C.)*, and he has been asked by many parishioners "Who is in charge, Tony?" The answer is a simple one. Mr Prescott from the Working Men's Club will be in charge of day-to-day matters unless anything important occurs in the vicar's semi-absence. In that case, Mr Prescott will refer the matter upwards, ie to Mr Campbell. I hope that is clear. T.B.

Talking Point

● You know, computers are the future! No doubt about it! I want to see a parish in which every home is on the net, and every child in our local schools has a PC on his or her desk, from which they can download all the riches of the world's knowledge. It is a truly exciting voyage of discovery for every young mind!

Yet there are dangers. I know, from watching my own kids, as they sit at home staring vacantly at the screen for hours on end, or surfing mindlessly through some "chat room", how destructive these computers can be of family life and the normal give-and-take of human relationships.

That is why I am coming round to the view that all computers should be banned, both in schools and homes, so that we can all rediscover the old-fashioned pleasure of eating family meals round the TV!

You know, I'm getting quite cynical about the whole internet thing! T.B.

QUEEN AND PRINCE PHILIP

Will They Re-Marry?

by Our Court Staff **Major Ron Knee**

THERE was speculation last night that Her Majesty The Queen and the Duke of Edinburgh might re-marry.

For many years the couple have lived separate lives with the Duke spending much of his time abroad.

Recently, however, the Queen (73) and her consort have been spending more and more time in one another's company.

Only last week they were spotted by millions of people opening the new pedestrian bridge over half of the River Thames.

WE DO

A palace insider told me: "They have a lot in common and they are more mature than they were 50 years ago. Obviously, both of them are keen to set an example of stable family life to their children."

HAVE YOU SEEN THESE THUGS?

Do you know the identities of these mindless hooligans – responsible for defacing countless statues and war memorials in London?

If you recognise any of these pigeons phone Scotland Yard or the tabloid paper of your choice today.

POLLY FILLER

SHOULD women write about wearing knickers? That's the big debate this week, the issue that's got the nation's female columnists battling it out in the broadsheets. Talk about getting your knickers (or lack of them) in a twist!

Well, since you ask, Polly Filler is firmly in the "No Knicker" camp. I don't personally think my column needs knickers and I don't think women should write about knickers just to please men. Got that? Only last week my partner, the useless Simon, stirred himself from watching Jeremy Clarkson's pro-celebrity cock-fighting from Taipei on Sky Nasty III to ask in a pathetic little boy voice if I'd write about knickers – just for his enjoyment.

In your dreams, Simon! Some of us have got more important things to write about than gussets and lacy lingerie and crotchless M&S peek-a-boo scanties. OK?

And, if sad male readers are hoping that this piece will contain the word "thong", then they are going to be sadly disappointed.

Grow up, boys – and grow up girls as well. It's not as though there aren't *real* issues in the world for women to debate. Like, should Liz Hurley suck a dummy to give up smoking?

So could my colleagues kindly do everyone a favour and take their knickers off the page and put them where they belong: in their drawers (no pun intended!).

© P. Filler

EXCLUSIVE TO ALL NEWSPAPERS

MAN ON TELLY DOES SOMETHING OR OTHER

by Our Men-Behaving-Badly Staff **Phil Space**

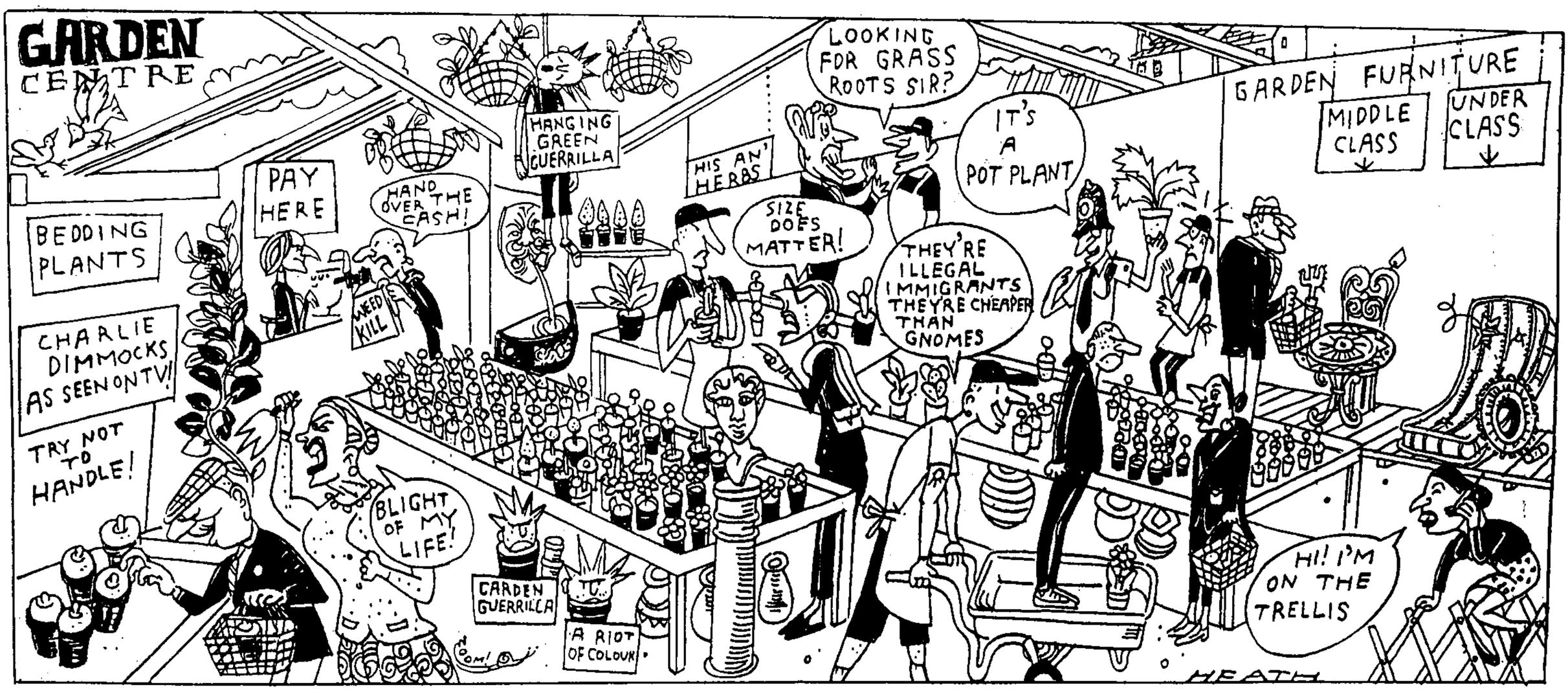
A MAN who appears on television was seen yesterday with a woman who appears on television as well.

The woman's husband who also appears on television said something or other to reporters. Friends of all three people who appear on television added something else. A spokesman for the man who appears on television said "No comment".

On other pages

Footballer gets tattoo **3, 4, 5**
Celebrity's wife does bra ad **6, 7, 8**
Africa descends into anarchy **94**

HEATH'S PRIVATE VIEW



What You Won't Read In The Murdoch Press

THE Sun

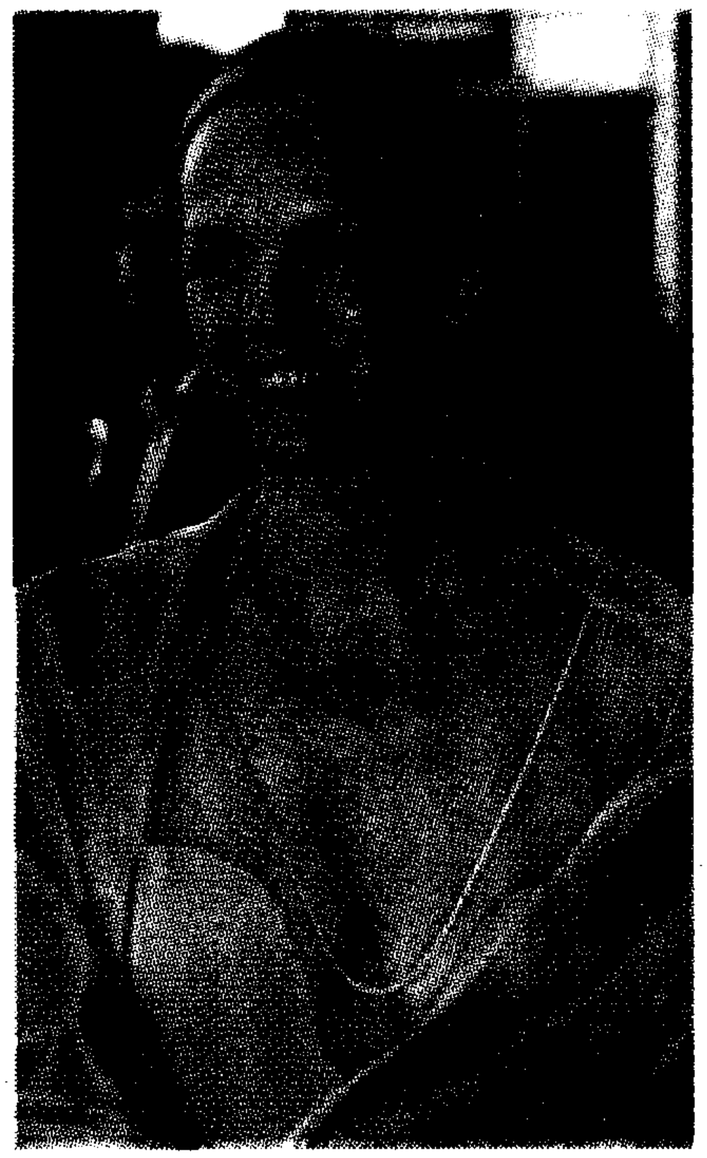
Friday, May 19, 2000 30p THE PEOPLES PAPER

WE TOLD YOU NOT TO VOTE FOR LIVINGSTONE – AND SURE ENOUGH HE WON EASILY! ✗

It all goes to show that when it comes to elections – "IT WAS THE SUN WOT DID NOT WON IT"

DIGGER'S DAUGHTER DOES DIRTY ON DYING DAD

By Our Filth Staff
DAVID YELLOW



BLONDE bombshell Liz Murdoch has not only dumped her hubbie! Now she's dumped her Dad as well!

The Dirty Digger's even-dirtier-daughter has shown her gratitude to her Sugar Daddy by giving him two fingers!

Randy Rupe gave lovely Liz a job at soaraway Sky TV, but when he didn't make her the Big Boss she thanked the suffering satellite supremo by blowing a big raspberry at him on his sickbed!

Said sorrowing Dad from his Peking Love Nest, "Elizabeth has shown no loyalty and treated me like dirt. She has behaved appallingly. I am proud to call her my daughter."

Sex-siren Liz meanwhile has got a bun in the oven courtesy of the King of the Spin, PR man Matthew Fraud, who is believed to be delighted with the news that his live-in partner Liz is up the duff. Said Matthew, in a quote that we have just made up in the office, "The baby will be a bastard — just like his grandfather." *(That's enough exaggerated, intrusive, half-baked tabloid drivel. Ed.)*

THE SON SAYS

Ha ha ha, I'm going to get it all! It's mine all mine!

© L. Murdoch

THE NEW ORTHODOXY

Film Highlights

The Love Bug Goes To Manila

Having just won the Monte Carlo rally, "Herbie" travels to the Philippines from where everyone's favourite Volkswagen Beetle unleashes an e-mail virus that lays waste to half the world's computer systems.

***Eye rating:* A crashing bore**

My first day at school by William Hague aged 5

9.05 am: Refused to sit next to the gypsy children from behind the estate because they smell, and demanded Mrs Rourke immediately remove them instead to a secure classroom with no windows.

9.27 am: Unfairly sent to the headmaster's office for using reasonable force to defend my box of Crayolas from being viciously borrowed.

9.40 am: Made leader of the Conservative Party.

HUSBAND

Stelling, 30, was born in Johannesburg and has played for Western Province and Boland in South Africa but qualifies as English for cricketing purposes because of Dutch ancestry. *The Times*

Berkshire's Independent Web-Window
web4berks.com
Advertisement, Reading Evening Post

YESTERDAY IN PARLIAMENT

Presenter: The main business in the Commons yesterday was a heated debate on the right of female MPs to breast-feed in the Chamber.

Ms Patsy Jacket *(Nusildon, Lab)*: Ms Speaker, it is an outrage that, at the beginning of the 21st century, I am not allowed to breast-feed my baby during debates. What kind of example are we setting to the rest of the country, when a supposedly modern Government like Tony's can't even allow a basic human right to be exercised in the legislative chamber of the Unmarried Mother of Parliaments?

(Tory cries of "Get your tits out for the Labs!")

The late Alan Clark *(for it is she)*: Bit of a scrubber but I wouldn't mind taking her round the jumps?

The Speaker *(Mrs Boothroyd)*: You're dead, so keep quiet. Ms Jacket, I have told you before that I will not have public displays of mammarian apparatus in this Chamber. So, kindly fasten your blouse.

(Tory cries of "Shame!")

Presenter: Meanwhile the House of Lords was electrified by a contribution from Lord Barg of South Bank.

Lord Barg: Good evening and welcome to tonight's speech by myself. As noble lords will know, I am a very important person, and that now I am a working peer, I am even more important. Not that I can afford to spend much time here in the House of Lords (except for lunch obviously) because I have a very important job outside this House, as I may have mentioned before.

That is why, if we are to drag this House into the 21st Century that Tony Blair has led us into, two reforms are absolutely vital.

The first is that, if important people like me are to be expected to come here, we should be paid at least £10,000 a day.

And secondly, when we get here, we should be given proper modern facilities, such as phones, faxes e-mails, etc, so that we can conduct our very important outside business, such as setting up interviews with major international artists such as Dolly Parton and "Posh Spice".

But that's enough of the more staid world of Westminster. The real political excitement nowadays is to be found in the devolved chambers in Scotland and Wales. In Edinburgh yesterday the MSPs moved a motion of censure on Donald Dewar for only providing Dundee Cake in the Scottish Parliament cafeteria.

Joyce McWhingie *(East Kiltshire, SNP)*: Mr Presiding Officer, it is an outrage that, at the beginning of the 21st Century, the only cake offered to members of this Parliament is Dundee, an unrepresentative cake from a single Scottish city. What kind of message is this giving to our constituents in the rest of Scotland? I tell you, there are perfectly good cakes which come from Auchtermuchty, Bannockburn, Rockall and every other part of this great nation of cake-makers.

(Cries of "Death to the English!", "Braveheart forever!")

Presenter: Meanwhile, in Cardiff there was an angry exchange when a Plaid Cymru AM, Hugh Davies, accused Lib Dem David Hughes of not speaking in Welsh when he wished him good morning in the toilet.

Huw Davies *(Cwm Rhondda, PC)*: Pwllgwn-gychllanrobllantsyliogogoch...

FM's "Music To Send You Back To Sleep While You're Eating Your Breakfast" Show, with Sid Wagner.)

The Literary Sensation of the Millennium!

What You Missed

THE KINGSLEY AMIS LETTERS

The world of one of England's greatest literary figures of all time at last revealed in its raw, thrusting, visceral *(Get on with it. Ed.)*

Letter 365

To Philip Larkin

12 Oct 1968

Dear Old Bumface,
Did you see that piece in The Times by that dreadful leftie Rees-Mogg[1]? What a load of bum. Must go now. Feeling a bit pissed.
Yours, Kingers

[1]This is a reference to Lord "Bill" Deedes, long-serving editor of the Daily Telegraph and a Cabinet minister in the second administration of Pitt the Elder (1756-61).

Letter 978

To The Editor of The Times

10 April 1975

Dear Sir,
How can your views on anything be taken seriously when, in a leader on the future of education, you use a hanging participle in conjunction with a gerundive, unsupported by any clausal noun? What a leftie bastard you must be!
Your humble and obedient servant,
K. Amis
The Garrick Club, WC2.

PS. You can cut the last bit if you like! I was a bit pissed when I wrote it.

Letter 979

To Philip Larkin

10 April 1975

Dear Bumface,
I have just written a brilliant letter to The Times about the complete collapse of standards in their pages. I don't suppose they'll print it, being a bunch of lefties! I gather Rees-Mogg is a Jew to boot. Not sure about that last bit. I'm a bit pissed.
Bum, bum, bum,
Kingers

'The Collected Letters Of Sir Kingsley Amis OM' is published in three volumes by Fishwick & Tweed, £299.99.

UPROAR AT BBC APPOINTMENT

by Our Political Staff **Peter Tory-Bias**

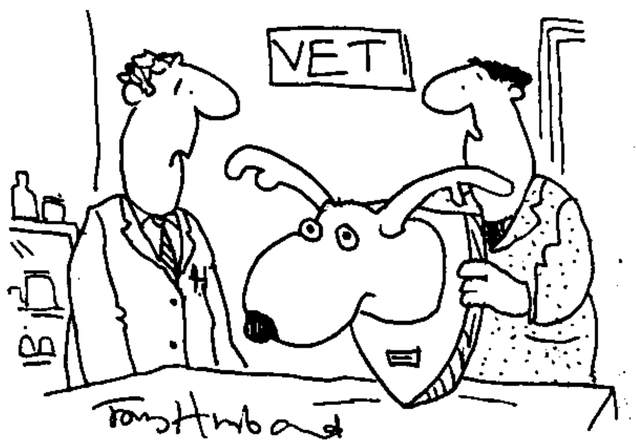
SHOCKWAVES today engulfed the strife-torn BBC with the news that top political commentator Andrew Borr, a known left-wing sympathiser is to replace the other man that no one had heard of as the Chief Political Editor.

Borr, 41, formerly the editor of the Indescribablyboring and latterly a columnist on the Observer (or possibly the Daily Express) is a close personal friend of the Prime Minister Tony Blair and is known to lunch regularly with Alastair Campbell.

When challenged on his close links with New Labour, Mr Borr said, "I shall supress any personal loyalties I may have and will report for the BBC without bias or prejudice on the stunning achievements of this government under the inspired leadership of the brilliant Tony Blair."

ON OTHER PAGES

Stop This Evil BBC Man by the Daily Mail's unbiased Stephen Hand-In-Glover-With-Hague.



"It's hair keeps falling out"

WHO ARE THEY?

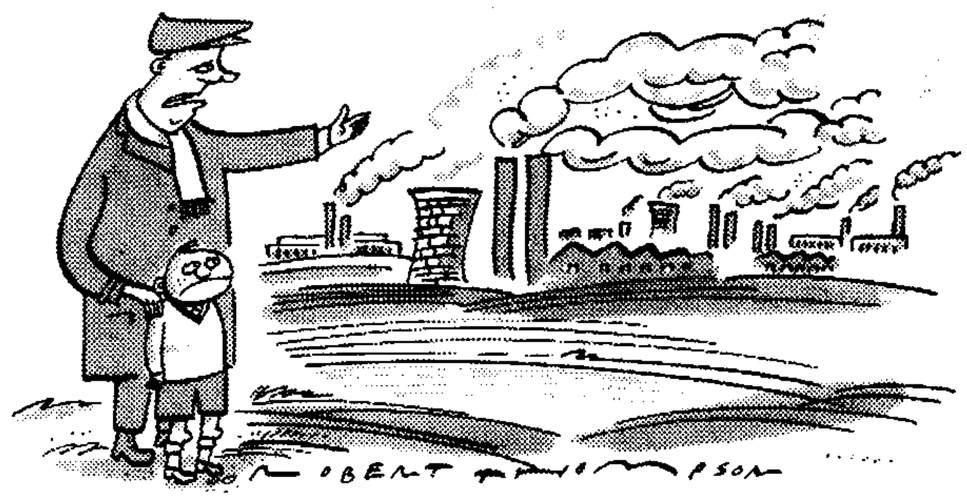
Ken's New Team To Run London

Jenny Gavroche, 51, divorced wife of millionaire media mogul Lord Mirabelle. Jenny, who lives in Haringey, sits on over 100 advisory bodies, task forces, review groups and non-governmental organisations, including the North London Sandwich Board, the Traffic Lights Authority and the Fish and Chips Licensing Agency and is Deputy Chair of Friends of the Archway Footbridge Trust. Jenny is to be Ken's No. 2 as Vice-Mayor.

Winji Hatterjee, 41, high-flying race relations expert with special brief for race relations at the Lambeth Institute for Race Relations. Winji recently described the Duke of Edinburgh as "a fascist mass-murderer who in a civilised society would be taken out and macheted to death". He is to be Ken's race relations supremo in charge of rooting out racism in the race relations industry.

Ken Cruiser, 22, known as "Green Ken", has been a lifelong member of the Green Party and has worked as Chief Environmental Co-ordinator on Tower Hamlets Council's Table Tennis and Snooker Sub-Committee. Ken is a passionate believer in burning cars to solve the capital's pollution problems, and is also a keen gay.

Lord Tape, 66, known as "Red Tape". Lib Dem high-flyer, formerly chair of Tooting Bec Council Bicycle Tracks and Canal Towpath Restoration Committee has turned down Ken's offer to run London transport because, he says, "I cannot agree with Ken's policy on Chechnya." *(That's enough New Team. Ed.)*



"One day, son, all this will be art galleries"

BBC IN ROYLE FAMILY MIX-UP

by Our Media Staff

AN embarrassed BBC spokesman at the Montreux TV Festival admitted yesterday that there had been "a terrible error" when two members of the cast of the BBC comedy *The Royle Family* were sent off to India by mistake.

The spokesman said: "We now realise that Caroline Aherne and Craig Cash should never have been allowed to make a documentary called *Back Passage To India* on BBC1 which was undoubtedly the worst documentary ever made on any subject by a television company.

"This disaster," he continued, "occurred due to a regrettable confusion in our minds between making proper programmes and letting celebrity comedians indulge in any self-promoting, patronising drivel that they felt like."

Caroline Aherne and Craig Cash were furious at the mix-up, which may have prevented them from being taken seriously ever again. Said Caroline Aherne, "Ooh, the toilets are smelly. I'll just put on some lippy aah what a luvly country" *(cont'd. p. 94)*

THE DAILY TELEGRAPH

Liz Hurley Suckers Dummy

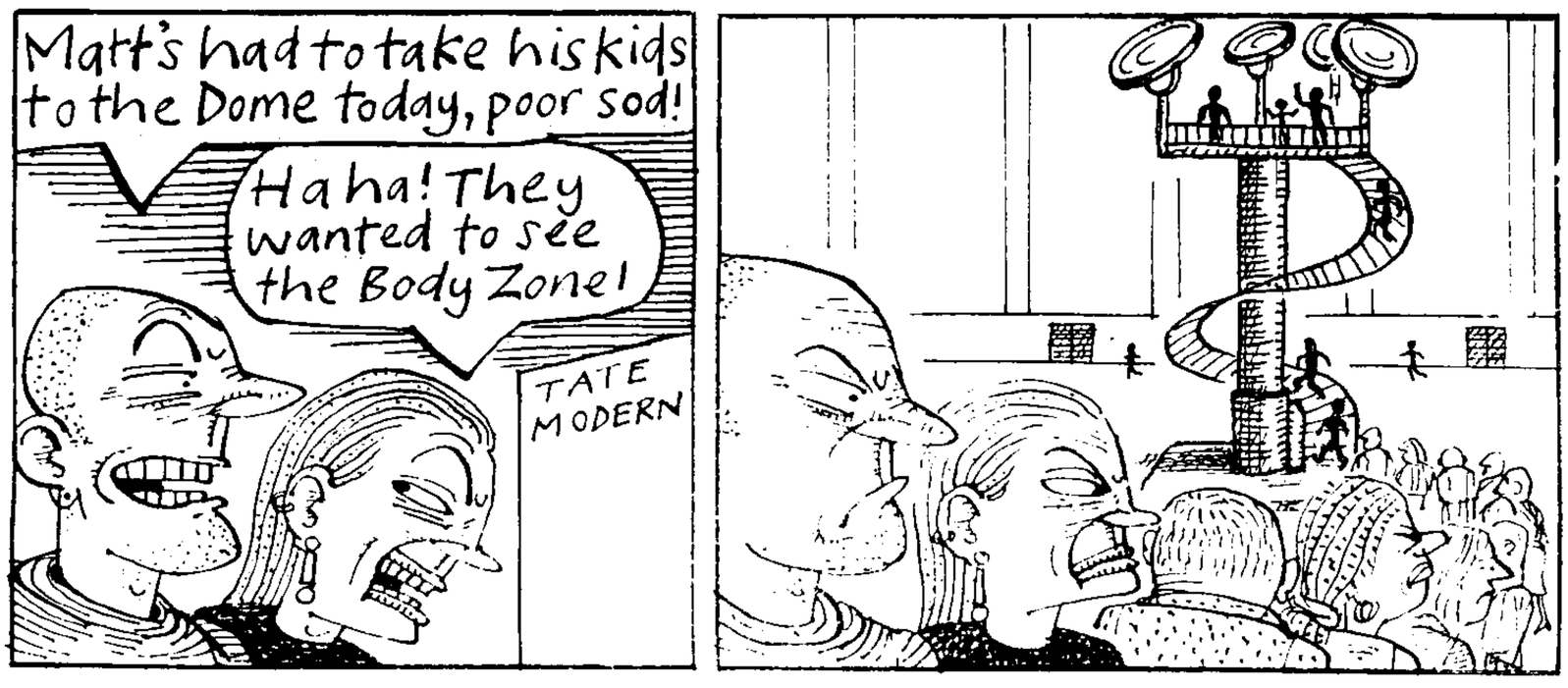
By Our Entire Staff

TODAY the actress Liz Hurley was seen on the front page of the Daily Telegraph using a dummy (Charles Moore) to get herself even more publicity than normal.

Experts said that the dummy was a proven method of appearing in the Telegraph. "Liz just takes off her clothes and the dummy does the rest. It really does work."

Liz Hurley has recently taken up smirking.

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS (1) BY BIRCH



PADDINGTON INQUIRY LATEST

WHY DID THE BUCK FAIL TO STOP?

INVESTIGATORS into the Paddington Rail disaster admitted last night that they could not say for certain exactly why the buck had failed to stop anywhere after the crash.

"It could be a combination of factors," said a spokesman. "Timidity, greed, whitewash, we're just not sure. All we do know is that no one is to blame for the buck's tragic failure to come to a halt on anyone's desk." *(Reuters)*

LONDON

The Most Exciting City In The World

THE unveiling of the new power station on the South Bank confirms London's position as the most exciting city in the world.

From every corner of the globe visitors are pouring in to see for themselves the incredible "swinging London" that has sprung up overnight. Famous film stars, such as Madonna and Hugh Grant, have chosen to live in the grooviest capital in Europe. Where else can you see such a host of cutting-edge attractions as the Millennium Dome, the London Eye, the Tate Modern and, er, the Jubilee Line? No wonder film stars like Madonna are flocking from all over the world to see Hugh Grant on the London Eye or to enjoy a cafe latte in one of the famous pavement cafes of Notting Hill.

But let us not forget that London is an overcrowded city in a small and overcrowded island, cursed with a transport system that would have disgraced the Middle Ages. There simply isn't room for all these foreigners to come over here, gawping at our art exhibitions and claiming social security.

Mr Hague and Ms Widdecombe are surely right when they say an enormous prison should be built to house all these unwanted visitors to our shores. *(Surely this is the wrong editorial? Ed.)*

CRITICS HAIL NEW SCULPTURAL TRIUMPH

by Our Art Staff **Richard Dormouse, Richard Cock and Rowan Mooreplease**

A HALF-FINISHED bridge across the River Thames was yesterday unveiled by the Queen as the unexpected hit of the new Tate Modern collection.

"The Bridge" by sculptor Sir Anthony Caro was unanimously hailed by critics as the single most important work of art in London, or indeed anywhere else.

A BRIDGE TOO SHORT

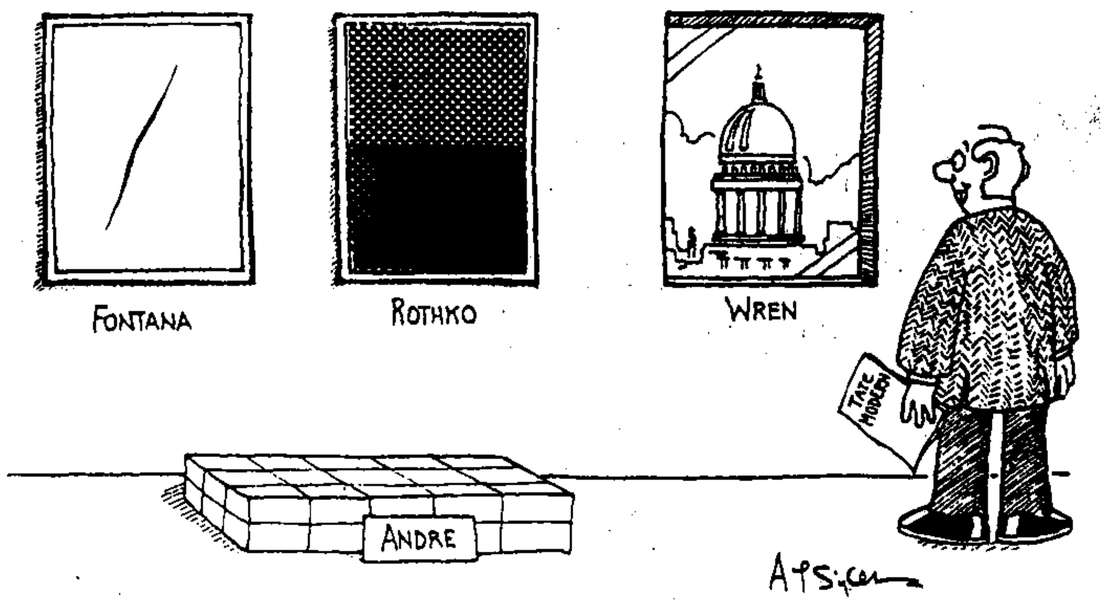
"Caro's masterpiece," said one man with a beard, "is a perfect enigmatic metaphor for the condition at the start of the 21st Millennium.

"Is the bridge half-finished, or half-unfinished? That is the question for the spectator to decide, as he falls into the river."

Another leading expert, with a stud in his tongue, said "It is a marvellous post-modern joke, recalling the work of Belgian surrealists such as Giomelli, Ludqvist Trasch and Albert Garbage."

HOW TO GET THERE

Take 23A bus from Liverpool Street. Change at Fenchurch Street for District Line to Woodhead South. Taxi to M25, walk through Bushays Park (15 mins), Metropolitan Line to Vauxhall East, swim across river to catch Riverbus Service 106F via Charing Cross and jump off onto ladder ascending to viewing area on bridge.



A specially commissioned poem to celebrate the opening of **Tat Modern** by top poet James Fenton

(Reprinted without permission from the Guardian)

Just a few lines then
At your request
Mr Rusbridger.
Easily done
Sir, I said.

For a small cheque.
Everyone loves Tate Modern.
Not very good I know but
The basic idea is there.
Or nearly. At least it's
Not as bad as Andrew Motion.

E. James Fenton (70½)

EARN £100/DAY
TEACHER'S WANTED
Surrey Advertiser

WORK VIRUS INVADES THE CITY

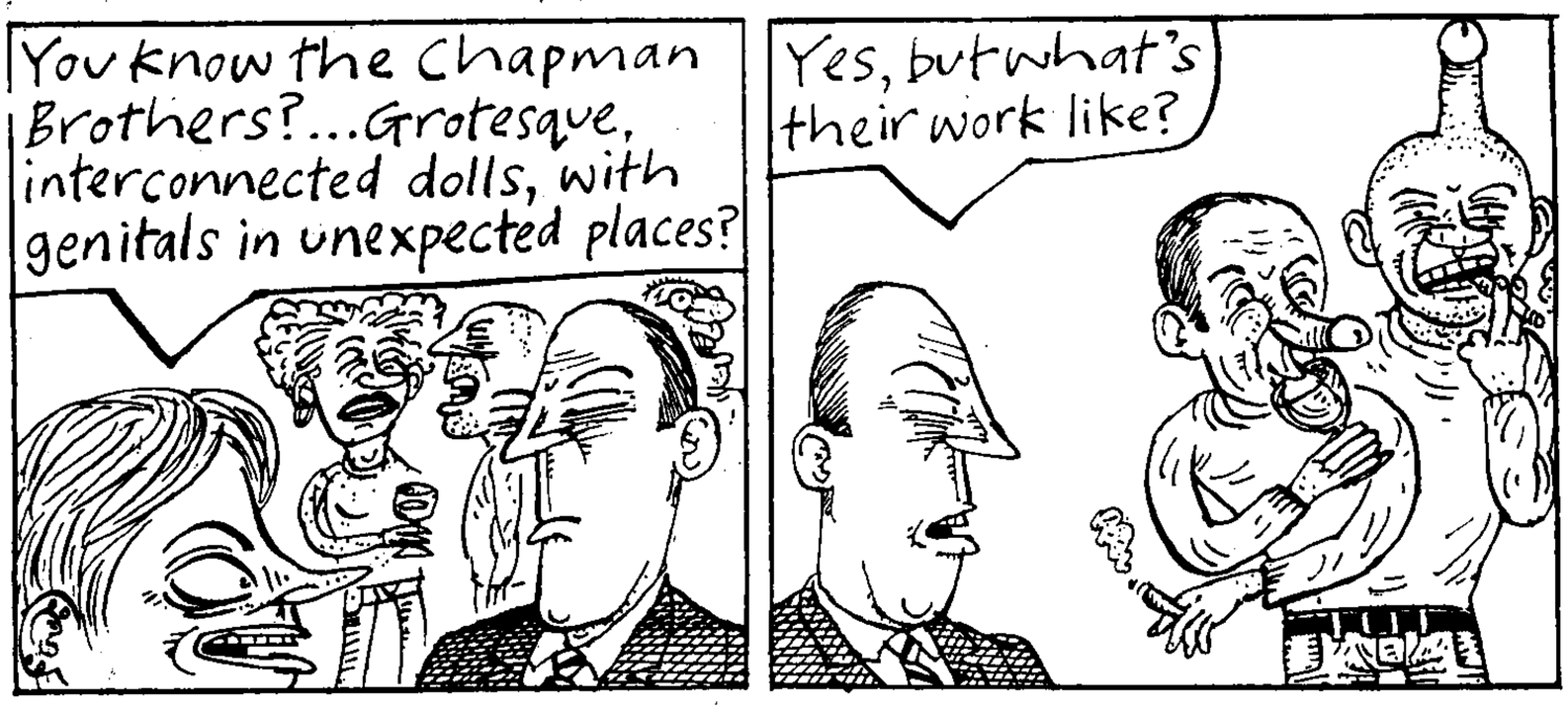
by Our E-correspondent **Mack Intosh**

AS COMPUTER system after computer system crashed world-wide, Britain's offices were in chaos yesterday as a never-before-seen "work virus" spread throughout the country.

"At first only a handful of us started working," said one disgruntled employee, "but soon it spread like wildfire to every department; there seemed to be no way to stop it."

However, computer experts assured workers affected by the virus that, before they knew it, they'd soon be back on-line sending personal e-mails, playing solitaire and downloading hardcore porn.

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS (2) BY BIRCH


You know the Chapman Brothers?...Grotesque, interconnected dolls, with genitals in unexpected places?
Yes, but what's their work like?

DIARY

MARTIN AMIS

I must have been five or six at the time. Five years old. Or six. *Years old.* How long it lasts – as long as a string of pineapple pizza regurgitated onto the forecourt of a Q8 garage on the outskirts, *the skirt-outs*, of Epping – that time between *cinq* and *six*, that period immediately before the "female of the species" is comprehended in all her subcutanaeous quiddity. My father, sensing, perhaps, that I was undergoing a double ice-cream-scoop-without-flake of sexual anxiety, commandeered me quotidianly into a high street branch* of Boots the Chemist and ordered me a couple of hundredweight of unused condoms for twelve quid. By the termination of that week, I had reached the end of the crate, and every female in our street was cacophonously begging for more of the same. For more. *Of the same.* For more: of the same. But still I suffered beneath the dark black ill-lit nonluminous cloud of non-specific sexual anxiety brought about by the Cold War. Only when these women had schlapped through my letter-box a round-robin proclaiming me – embarrassingly, cringeworthily, but I confess it here, now – the "finest young sexual athlete" they had "ever encountered", did I begin to emerge from my terrifyingly numinous chrysalis of dashed hopes, hopes really terribly *dashed.*

The Cold War, incautiously coupled with America's ack-ack-ack involvement in Vietnam, ensured that in the summer of my fifteenth year my forehead sympathetically erupted in a vertiginous outcrop of zits. Pentagonic hushhushery makes it hard to uncover whether or not President Lyndon B. Johnson was aware of the zitty canyons** and great ravines on my fifteen-year-old forehead; my novelist's addiction to seeing parallels and making connections now makes me feel that America maintained its presence in Vietnam solely to give this young writer anxiety-induced acne. America. Amis. *Amisrica.* The land – terrifying, mysteriously, quidditively – was becoming *the writer.*

Just as Flaubert had once taunted Turgenev in Paris, I was to taunt The Hitch in Bayswater. My third novel *Zitty Warheads: A Warning to the Planet* had just been published and the English press had been predictably envious and destructive, the Guardian's hunchbacked squalids derisively calling it "among" – (and please note, dear reader, that sneery, halitosis-sodden, archly qualificatory "among") – "among the greatest novels of the 20th century". Valued reader, it is not for me to say this is envy. It is for YOU to say that it is envy.

So I was feeling cheapened and soiled, chasteningly taken aback by a spite-filled entity I had once thought I understood: England. The Hitch and I were in a burpfarty willybumcrack dive off the Portobello road and drinking like men – one half of Skol leapfrogged swiftly by another, two packs of salt and vinegar, heavy on the salt, don't hold back on the vinegar, *mush*, then another half of Skol, this time with a desperate slash of lime, followed by a Pepsi, all black, no ice – when I rasped that, *fuckitman*, I preferred early Conrad to later James and middle Nabokov*** to either of them. The Hitch immediately puked into the pocket of a passing paediatrician and snorted vomitoriously that middle James could beat early James and late Nabokov hands down, *ansdarn.*

"Come outside and say that." The words shinned out of my mouth like a nuclear siren signalling the decimation of a world boorishly encyclopaedic in its slavish variety. On the ashpuke streets wheezing with urine-drenched tramps, The Hitch and I squared up to one another, eyes unblinking, *like men.* I flexed my arms; The Hitch flexed his. *GO!* Hands working faster than the speed of travelling luminous energy, we began to trade smacks, all the while singing, "A sailor went to *sea sea sea* to see what he could *see see see* and all that he could *see see see* was the –" By this time, we were biffing our way through it**** full pelt. But (the rapid strokes of the writer's mind) I got to the end – "bottom of the deep blue *sea***** *sea sea*" – before him, and The Hitch collapsed, fighting for breath like a man fighting for breath, his defeat ameliorated by his knowledge that with his hands and his rhyme he had just been a participant in the tumescent whirligig of 20th century literary history.

Though his airy tailoring left much to be desired, I have no little sympathy for Jesus Christ – for he, too, suffered crucifixion on account of his fame******. The combined terrorism of the self-styled media in this sordid little offshore island have forced me into the position of being the most celebrated man in Britain today, and the sheer brutal burden on the quiddity of the writer is crushing. These days, I cannot walk through my own home without someone recognising me, and when I go out to the shops to buy, say, a cardboard spermbank of milk, I only have to remove my shades and say "A pint of milk for Martin Amis – that's me" and I am recognised without warning. "Ewe dat Mar In Ay Miz, innit?" blurts the sweatsodden shopkeeper as he claws at my loose change. I hope this makes the "gentlemen" of the British press – remorselessly interviewing me over two, three, bumfucking *four* pages every time I have a new book out, then stabbing me repeatedly with their shopworn superlatives – very happy indeed. Very happy. *Indeed.* But Christ's books, perceptive and with a certain postdiluvian charm if somewhat stagey, remain rightly celebrated today – judicious testaments, like my own, to the permanence of a writer's worth. Of a writer's *sublunary* worth.

---

*Shakespeare also employs the word "branch" to great effect in his considerable stage-play King Lear, a sort of simplistic bearded septuagenarian forerunner to John Self in Money (1983).

**I recall that when I first encountered the Grand Canyon, some sixteen smegma years later, I felt immediate empathy for a force of nature similarly endowed; though of course the Grand Canyon has yet to publish a major novel.

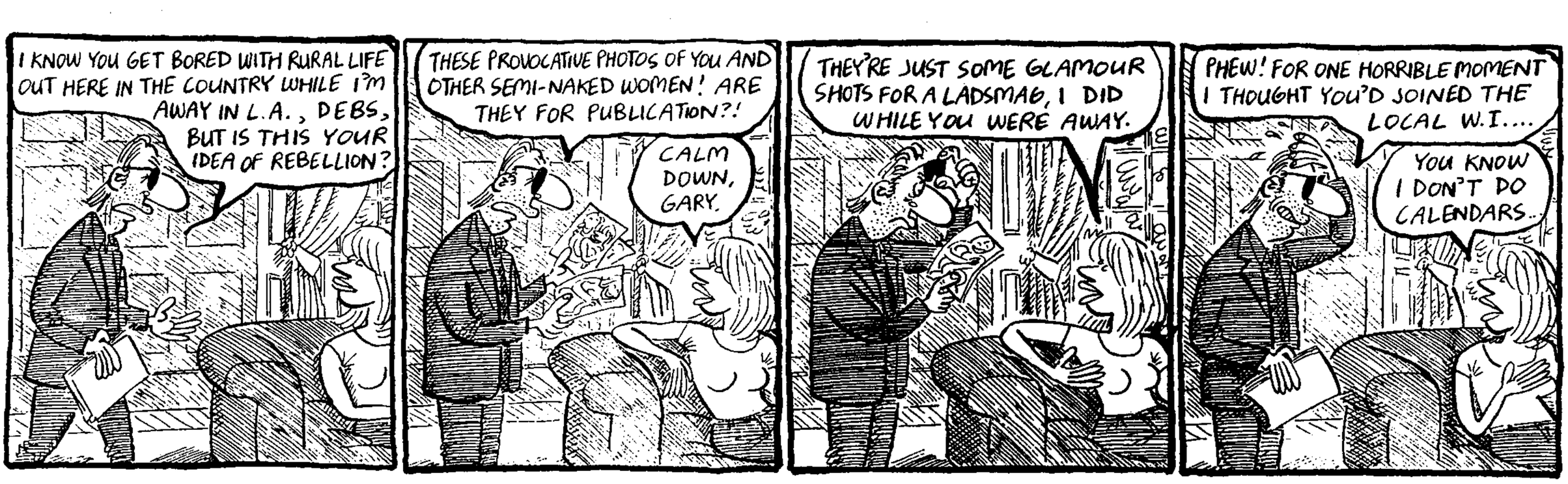
***See later chapter on Nabokov's magisterial use of the semi-colon in *Pale Fire.*

****I remember the egregiously envious smile that came over John Updike's lips – liplike and lippy – when he congratulated me on my use of the word "it" in Time's Arrow (1991).

*****Like Conrad, I have always found the sea terrifyingly powerful, and inarguably *liquid.*

******And he, too, was the famous son of someone famous.

As told to
CRAIG BROWN


I KNOW YOU GET BORED WITH RURAL LIFE OUT HERE IN THE COUNTRY WHILE I'M AWAY IN L.A., DEBS, BUT IS THIS YOUR IDEA OF REBELLION?
THESE PROVOCATIVE PHOTOS OF YOU AND OTHER SEMI-NAKED WOMEN! ARE THEY FOR PUBLICATION?!
CALM DOWN, GARY.
THEY'RE JUST SOME GLAMOUR SHOTS FOR A LADSMAG, I DID WHILE YOU WERE AWAY.
PHEW! FOR ONE HORRIBLE MOMENT I THOUGHT YOU'D JOINED THE LOCAL W.I....
YOU KNOW I DON'T DO CALENDARS..

Literary Review

Mock Tudor

Elizabeth R
David Starkey
(Chatto & Windus, £20)

YOU might suppose — what with the TV gigs and the string of crisp little radio cameos — that Dr David Starkey had given up on the day job. But no: the author of such works as *Revolution Reassessed: revisions in the history of Tudor government and administration* still functions as a serious professional historian, retains his fellowship at Fitzwilliam College Cambridge and sits on the board of *History Today*.

But this is the modern media age, loves, and even serious professional historians are expected to wing down from the mountain to share the fruits of their research with the unlettered throng, to do eye-catching TV series and assemble dinky little spin-off books.

Elizabeth R is a splendid example of the latter: clever chap who knows his onions, persuaded — not in so many words but doubtless the producer's instructions were made perfectly clear — to dress it all up in a form that was a) appropriate to the presumed sensibilities of the small-screen audience and b) *relevant*.

You get the idea? No doubt Dr Starkey did, for what follows in this study of Elizabeth I's apprenticeship is the literary equivalent of Hollywood's current obsession with the Tudor age: truck loads of contemporary cliché, buttressed by the assumption that all these funny people with beards and ruffs were pretty much like us when it all comes down to it, and certainly ripe to be analysed by way of some thoroughly up to the minute early 21st century assumptions.

But first things first. Dr Starkey's prose style is a delicious affair, full of portentous one-liners ("How soon men forget" etc, etc) and packed out with genteel hilarities. The early portrait of Elizabeth that especially interests him betrays an "aching vulnerability". A bit later when Henry VIII throws over Catherine of Aragon the "Spanish pigeons" come home to roost, don't you know? Never mind, Henry manages to "cut the Gordian knot", although pretty soon "insult is added to injury" when daughter Mary is sent to lodge in a household run by her new stepmother's aunt and uncle.

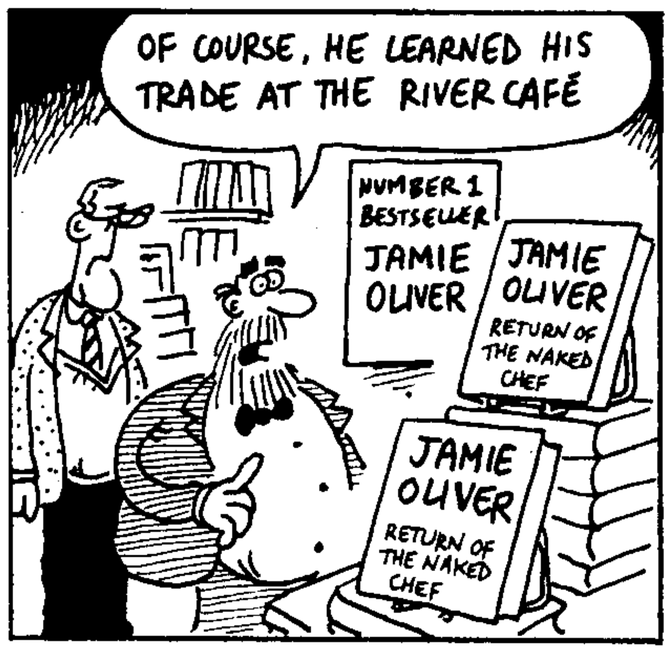
Are you still with us? A little further on, parental favour having been withdrawn, his daughter "had literally nothing to wear" (oddly there are no contemporary accounts of Elizabeth running around naked). Admitted to the Tudor family portrait of 1544, however, she had "triumph in her heart". Almost as bad as this is Starkey's urge to explain everything for the benefit of the morons of whom he imagines his audience to consist.

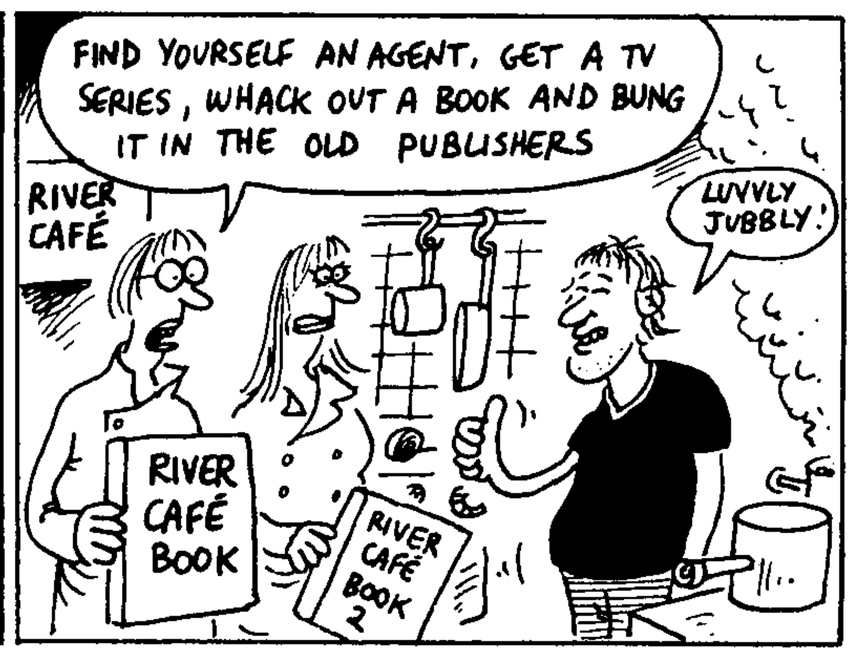
"Elizabeth was royal", he briskly begins. "That meant her entry into the world was vested with ceremony and hopes that went far beyond the ordinary." No, really? A bit later he offers some illuminating comment on her old dad: "One of the ironies in the life of Elizabeth is that she, who was to be a Virgin Queen, had a father who was married six times." Not *that* ironic, surely? Oh, and "There are two reasons for a man to marry so often. Either he does not take marriage seriously enough or, alternatively, he takes it far too seriously and expects too much from it."

Well, this is sound stuff, is it not? Worse than this, though — far, far worse — are the modern lifestyle garnishes. After all, what's the point in making TV series about all these funny old dead people if we can't prove that what they got up to was largely what we get up to, leaving aside that they're old and dead and were too stupid to invent mobile phones?

So Mary, Liz's big sister, had "more than a touch of teenage hysteria" and Catherine Parr, Henry's sixth and final wife, is a thoroughly modern chick, characterising her as "a real, complex and attractive woman" (as opposed to an unreal woman, presumably). Henry, pursuing this Tudor version of Gwyneth Paltrow, resembled "a modern middle-aged executive" bent on reliving his youth by "sleeping with a sexy young woman". A bit later spiritually-minded Catherine gathers her ladies-in-waiting around her and runs "a Tudor Open University course in religion at Henry's court".

Oh dear. *Oh dear*. You get the idea? Tudor England was exactly like ours, only of course not quite so nice (heads cut off, plague etc). But hist, gentle reader, there is an excuse for all this woeful fluff. Dr S has — lawks — "fallen half in love" with the young Elizabeth of the jacket portrait. Prose style, historical accuracy, seeing the past in its own terms — oh yes, love conquers everything. I fear men will soon forget.


OF COURSE, HE LEARNED HIS TRADE AT THE RIVER CAFÉ
NUMBER 1 BESTSELLER
JAMIE OLIVER
JAMIE OLIVER
RETURN OF THE NAKED CHEF
JAMIE OLIVER
RETURN OF THE NAKED CHEF


FIND YOURSELF AN AGENT, GET A TV SERIES, WHACK OUT A BOOK AND BUNG IT IN THE OLD PUBLISHERS
RIVER CAFÉ
LUVVLY JUBBLY!
RIVER CAFÉ BOOK
RIVER CAFÉ BOOK 2

Books & Bookmen

■ **SO, election day came and went but *Livingstone's London* failed to hit the bookshops, despite Gollancz editorial director Mike Petty's "incurable optimism" (see *Eye* 1000).**

It now appears Petty's faith was more misplaced than he admitted at the time. Although in public he suggested that he had taken delivery of at least part of Leninspart's manuscript, an associate of the author has now indicated that Red Ken had not so much as submitted a single word of his mayoral opus.

Normally a patient and friendly sort, Petty is understood to be livid with Livingstone for welching, and Gollancz is expected to be asking for some of its £20,000 advance back.

■ THE appointment of Christopher Davis as Dorling Kindersley's publisher by new owner Penguin caused sharp intakes of breath in the trade.

After all, Davis had only retired from the self-same job last September, announcing his departure with great ceremony at the firm's silver jubilee dinner. So, why has this old stager been exhumed?

One theory is that Penguin wanted to have someone on board who knew where the bodies were buried – no mean feat in a company with several international subsidiaries – but who was sufficiently detached from the fatal *Star Wars* bungles made by ex-chairman Peter "Daft Vader" Kindersley and his chief executive James Middlehurst to have credibility.

The timing of Davis' retirement apparently makes him the perfect choice – having departed three months before the disastrous Christmas that forced the company's sale. Curiously, however, it seems he was still on the DK payroll at the time of the Penguin takeover, having been retained as a consultant.

■ JUDGING by his performance at the Booksellers' Association conference gala dinner in Brighton last week, *Cassell Dictionary of Slang* writer Jonathon Green still hasn't mastered the art of public speaking.

Enlisted as guest speaker by the dictionary's publisher, which had sponsored the event, Green launched into an unfunny explanation of the origins of various swearwords, dwelling at length on the word "cunt". In doing so, he greatly offended some of the older booksellers and the younger, but more sensitive flowers present: one was heard to mutter: "This sort of thing may go down well in Camden Town Waterstone's, but not here."

Dying on his feet was bad enough, but Green had another reason to feel uncomfortable. Each guest had been given a glossy poster advertising Cassell's big project for this year, *The Beatles Anthology*, and Green found himself sharing a table with long-serving Fab Four henchman Neil Aspinall. An insensitive placing, perhaps, considering that only last year Green had to face George Harrison, one of Aspinall's employers, in the libel courts over defamatory remarks he had made about the ex-Beatle in his Jonathan Cape book *All Dressed Up* (see *Eyes* passim).

Junk mail

■ *A LOOK at the publicity material for next autumn's highlights in science fiction and fantasy reveals a touching degree of mutual support between authors working in the genre.*

Commenting on A Fortress of Grey Ice *by JV Jones, Robert Jordan describes Jones as "a striking writer... wonderful", while Jones herself reserves the word "wonderful" for Juliet E. McKenna, author of* The Gambler's Fortune.

In addition Jordan's own new book Winter's Heart *is applauded by Orson Scott Card as a "powerful vision of good and evil", while Iain M Banks proclaims that* Engines of Light *author Ken MacLeod "is going to be a major writer". By a startling coincidence, Jones, Jordan, Card, Banks, MacLeod and McKenna are all published by Little Brown Jug's SF offshoot, Orbit.*

'Bookworm'

IN THE BACK

JOHNNY COME OUT LATELY

FOR 19 years Johnny Kamara, who was convicted of murdering a betting shop manager in Toxteth, Liverpool, in March 1981, has protested his innocence.

Anyone who has ever shown an interest in miscarriages of justice has become used to his hand-written scrawl on prison notepaper, pleading for support. In April 1994, the Labour MP for Stoke on Trent Central, Mark Fisher, wrote to the *Eye* asking us to look at the Kamara case which he had been dealing with on and off for two years.

John Kamara

Mr Fisher admitted that at first sight there did not seem to be "anything much about this case to substantiate John Kamara's protestations of innocence". The letter went on, however: "He has continued to insist on his innocence and there has clearly been enough doubt to lead to a police inquiry."

Mr Fisher enclosed letters from two Tory under secretaries at the home office, Michael Jack and David Maclean, which poured the usual buckets of whitewash on the very suggestion of a miscarriage of justice. Well, John Kamara is now a free man, his conviction quashed by the court of appeal. The court's judgment on 10 May explains not only why the conviction was unsafe. It also demonstrates how and why this miscarriage was the result of deliberate deceit by the authorities in general and by the office of the director of public prosecutions (DPP) in particular. So bald was the deceit that the truth could not possibly have been uncovered by anyone investigating the case from the outside.

The appeal judges under Lord Justice Otton have protected the trial judge, Mr Justice McCowan, leading counsel at the trial and the jury from any serious criticism. They are stalwart in their defence of the highly dubious identification evidence against Kamara. On and on rolls the judgment, pouring balm on the original conviction.

Then on page 11 the tone changes. The heading sounds familiar. Non-Disclosure of Unused Materials. "This ground of appeal concerns 201 statements which were taken by the police in the course of the original enquiries and not discovered until recently." Somewhat embarrassed, Lord Justice Otton went on to demonstrate how the 201 statements contradict, indeed make utter nonsense of, the identification evidence that convicted John Kamara.

In particular there was a statement from a woman who saw the betting shop manager some time after he was meant to have been murdered. These, and several other undisclosed statements, reduce the entire prosecution case against Kamara to rubble.

How were these crucial documents not disclosed? The court of appeal judgment reveals that the statements were seen in the summer of 1981 by John Kay, a junior prosecution barrister. Mr Kay, who is now a high court judge, advised in writing that the defence, not surprisingly, was asking for all the relevant statements:

"In the particular circumstances of the case", wrote Mr Kay, "I can see no good reason why this facility should not be provided both as to those considered by the Crown material and those considered not to be material." He advised that access to all the relevant documents should be given to the defence solicitors. But it wasn't. "Most regrettably", say the appeal judges, "the existence of those 201 statements was never disclosed."

They came to Mr Kamara's attention in 1998 by accident. His case, arbitrarily rejected after the usual years of delay by the home office, was eventually taken up by the criminal cases review commission. His case worker there, Anona Mitchell, wrote to the director of public prosecutions asking for some documents which seemed to have gone missing, and incidentally requesting any others which might be relevant. Back came a large box with the 201 statements. From that moment Mr Kamara's freedom, after 19 years' false imprisonment, was assured.

On 30 March he was dumped outside the back gates of his prison with a bundle of his belongings and a travel warrant. In the six weeks since, he was been staying with Paddy Joe Hill, who was wrongly convicted as one of the Birmingham Six. Mr Kamara has received one Giro social security payment – for £119. Perhaps someone from the office of the director of public prosecutions, where they have admitted responsibility for this scandal, could lend him a few bob to tide him over before he gets presumably massive compensation.

Fits of peak on CJD

THE official response to the announcement that no evidence of new-variant Creutzfeld Jakob Disease (vCJD) had been found in a survey of 3,000 specimens of human tissue was to say that it's too soon to draw any conclusions (see *Eye* 1001).

There is very little discussion of the possibility that the feared "epidemic" is no more than an outbreak and the worst is already over.

Scientists such as Professor Roy Anderson, until recently Linacre Professor of Zoology at Oxford University, and his colleagues have argued for the official limits of the epidemic being so wide. In 1998 their range for total numbers was from 29 to 10,000,000.

But not all scientists believe it is impossible to be more precise. Professors Newby and Thomas, from City University, London, have been trying to get recognition for their methodology for years. In their 1999 statement to the BSE inquiry they predicted: "The most likely number of vCJD deaths is unlikely to exceed a few hundred, and is most likely to be about a hundred."

So far the prediction is proving disturbingly accurate. The total number of definite and probable cases of vCJD in the UK to date is 68, with a further three unconfirmed vCJD deaths.

Newby and Thomas have outlined the difficulty of getting their work published with academic referees. They were refused publication by *Nature* but were eventually accepted by the *British Food Journal*, despite the objection of the only referees willing to be named, Prof Anderson et al.

So has the outbreak peaked already? There were 17 cases confirmed in 1998 and 10 in each of the previous two years, but only 12 in 1999, with another possible waiting confirmation. The numbers confirmed after death so far this year, and those in the system, suggest that we are not at the foothills of an epidemic reaching hundreds or even tens of thousands. Indeed, around 100 cases of vCJD in all might be closer to the mark.

But why the reluctance to welcome news that the vCJD epidemic may not be as dreadful as some feared? One possible answer is the strength of the vCJD research gravy trains which this year alone will cost £26,083,000. Government advisers, meanwhile, have grown increasingly risk adverse after their predecessors had to spend three years in front of the BSE inquiry. They are most likely unwilling to admit that the range of government actions following the early massive predictions for vCJD might be expensive over-reactions.

Open (and shut in) cases

THE national audit office (NAO) has castigated the home office and prison service over continuing costly delays and unnecessary failure to release prisoners on parole.

It might well have had in mind the case of David Blagden (*Eyes passim*), who once again has had his application for parole refused after nearly 23 years in prison – for setting fire to a pair of church curtains and a pew.

Everyone accepts that his crime was a cry for help after the sudden death of his parents, but Blagden – who has now served a longer sentence than many murderers, multiple rapists and terrorists – has been told he must spend at least another year living successfully in an open prison before he will be considered for release.

The parole board made this demand six months ago. But the prison service sent Blagden to Lindholme, which was being wound down as an open prison in preparation for conversion into an immigration detention centre. Thus Blagden failed to get the "open" conditions and continues to be punished for events beyond his control.

More accountability for the prison service was one of the NAO's main recommendations. Blagden's lawyer Kevin O'Gorman will no doubt seize on the report when he protests that another year in jail through no fault of his own before his case is reviewed merely compounds his client's injustice.

● ELSEWHERE, meanwhile, perhaps the NAO will at last be able to persuade the home office to stop pouring good money after bad on Crams, the probation service's useless Case Record and Management System. The NAO has begun an inquiry after repeated studies over the past five years has condemned Crams as a complex nightmare which compromises officers' ability to do their jobs and has cost millions of pounds of taxpayers' money.

So far protests have fallen on deaf ears at the home office, which has wasted yet more millions by shelving yet another alternative system. And despite one of the latest test reports recording 425 continuing problems, probation officers have now been presented with Crams version 4.6.1 by Bull Information systems, which holds the £100m probation computer contract.

If it had listened in 1994 to senior probation officer David Colombi, who completed his PhD on the probation service and IT and recognised that Crams had serious shortcoming – the whole costly debacle might have been avoided. Instead the home office put pressure on Dr Colombi's probation bosses to stop publication of his subsequent book. An official dismissed it as the "personal, misguided opinions of one individual".

Dr Colombi went ahead with publication and disciplinary proceedings were started against him. He was then offered early retirement, which he reluctantly accepted after 22 years in the service. Shame given that he has been more than proven right.

● AS PART of the government's privatisation bonanza the home office called in Donaldsons, property consultant and surveyor, to advise on whether it could flog off the offices, hostels and homes currently run by local probation services.

The Donaldsons' survey, which the probation officers' union criticised as "inadequate, inconsistent and financially flawed", found that the scruffy and diverse property portfolio was not an attractive proposition for private buyers. It suggested that at least £30m would have to be spent on repairs and renovation to bring the estate "up to standard".

In the interim Donaldsons proposed that the entire estate should be centralised under a home office management team and run by an independent property agent – such as Donaldsons, which has just secured the contract to run the probation services family and divorce court estate and is eagerly awaiting to hear if it will get the rest.

CRINGE BENEFITS

IT WAS a Tory idea to begin with: how to make more money out of the disabled for a big private company.

After a "study of options" about what to do with the rather expensive government system for examining disabled people to see if they were entitled to benefit, the Tory government concluded that contracting out to the private sector was "most likely to deliver the improvements sought".

Tory ministers agreed and the publicly-owned Benefits Agency Medical Services was divided into three areas "to encourage competition in terms of bids". The Tory government fell in the spring of 1997, to be replaced by Labour with a huge majority and a secretary of state for social services, Harriet Harman, who had been eloquent in her condemnation of privatisation.

Ms Harman, however, was at once convinced of the case for privatising the testing of the disabled, and in February 1998 (in the interests of competition) she awarded the contracts for all three areas to one company, Sema.

It was a juicy contract too. A government memorandum at the time announced that the three contracts would cost the government £305m, a figure which, the memo announced, "represented savings of £62m" compared with what the service used to cost the taxpayer.

One problem which soon became clear was that Sema had no medical experience whatever. The British Medical Association, disgusted by the company's treatment of doctors and patients, complained officially that Sema executives "did not understand the complexities, having had no experience of employing doctors". This obviously worried the company so much that when the five original bidders were invited to discuss the complexities of their new contract with the BMA, which represents most British doctors, two declined, including SEMA.

If it didn't have any doctors or medically qualified staff, SEMA made sure it was well-stocked with "new" Labour lobbyists. It hired Westminster Strategy, which had a batch of such lobbyists on tap: Jo Moore, former Labour press officer; Mike Lee, who used to work for David Blunkett; and former chair of the Fabian Society and wanabee Labour candidate Mike Dauber. To clinch the business, SEMA acquired the then employment minister Andrew Smith as a speaker at its glittering conferences (see *Eye* 955).

Partly to make up for this lack of experience, SEMA engaged two companies as sub-contractors to do the new work, Nestor Healthcare group and Nestor Disability Analysts. The board of the former was graced by a former Tory MP, Charles Goodison-Wickes, who quickly made way for the more acceptable Anne Parker, who chairs the Carers Association and is an examiner for the Child Support Agency. Nestor Healthcare has just branched into prisons, explaining in true "new" Labour tradition that "prisoner numbers are steadily growing".

The performance of these Sema subsidiaries, and of privatisation in general, has recently been examined in detail by the House of Commons social services committee, whose shocking report has just been published. "Too often", says the report, "the organisation fails to deliver an adequate service... at its worst it puts claimants through examinations which are painful and distressing and gives poor advice."

Bizarre examples of the doctors' hostility to the people they are examining are provided by the report. In one case a patient was described as healthy because she could sit up watching television for up to two hours. In fact this patient could only watch television lying down. In another case a patient's dirty fingernails were submitted as evidence of his ability to work in the garden – whereas in fact he could not even wash himself.

The conclusion makes sad reading for the "new" Labour lobbyists and privatisers of past years. There has been no improvement whatever. "Our inquiry has led us to conclude that, so far, the primary focus of Sema has been on operational efficiency to achieve value for money rather than the delivery of a quality service."

How has Labour responded so far to these devastating allegations? It has handed over a confidential contract for running the Labour party's own membership records to... Sema. And Sema's subsidiary Nestor has won a contract for the provision of an immigration centre for Group 4.

Taking the PE

ONE of the most ruthless crackdowns ever on alleged expenses-fiddling in the prison service has just come to an end. The legal process has taken three and a half years and the cost to the taxpayer is unlikely to be a million pounds less than, well, a million pounds.

The process dates back to the autumn of 1996 when physical training instructors from prisons all over Britain attended a training course at the prison service's premises at Aberford Road, Wakefield. Expenses submitted from the course seemed to clash with receipts provided, and 29 of the officers were promptly suspended.

After a long process of interrogation and accusation, two trials were held in February this year. At the first trial, one officer pleaded guilty and was sentenced to 180 hours' community service and ordered to pay £1,000 towards costs. Six officers pleaded not guilty and were acquitted by the jury. At the second trial, eight officers were found not guilty. The crown dropped all charges against the other 10.

All the instructors will now be subjected to internal disciplinary investigations. They remain suspended on full pay... as they have been for the last three and a half years.

Whistleblowing in the wind

NURSE Bunny Pinnington (*Eye* 1000), who was sacked after blowing the whistle on a special school's shocking "do not resuscitate policy" towards profoundly disabled children, has had her industrial tribunal case thrown out for the most perverse legal technicality.

At a preliminary hearing two weeks ago her former employer, Swansea education authority, confessed that it had unlawfully sacked her at the beginning of July last year (apparently it could not legally dismiss her until after her internal appeal in October). But amazingly it then went on to argue that because she had failed to apply to the tribunal within the statutory three months of October, it had no jurisdiction to hear the case.

Mrs Pinnington, who had always believed – and indeed had been led to believe by Swansea – that her dismissal was effective from July, had duly filed her claim for unfair dismissal in August. She believed that common sense would dictate that because the error over dates was of the council's making, justice would ensure that her application, although now technically premature, would be allowed to stand.

But common sense and the law do not always go hand in hand and the Cardiff tribunal threw out her case – a fine test of the new legislation designed to protect whistleblowers.

Mrs Pinnington, despite being rewarded first with suspension for breach of confidence and then with the sack for her subsequent stress-related ill health, is determined to fight on. Although she has only a legal adviser pitched against the barrister and solicitors employed by the council, she is both to appeal against the tribunal's refusal to hear the case while at the same time submitting an entirely new application.

Those working for the rights of people with disabilities are closely monitoring her case. Last week the veteran campaigner Lord Ashley was writing to express his concerns to education secretary David Blunkett. It will test the government's professed commitment to whistleblowers.

High Principals

The Sting

WHEN Tony Boonham returned from sick leave to his lecturer's job at Hartpury College, Gloucester, he came across some papers which mystified him.

He had been running a course in bee-keeping at the agricultural college which is affiliated to the University of the West of England and is famous for its equine centre. In his files, Boonham found two invoices in his name for £12,480 and £2,800 for payment by the college to a local supplier for bee-keeping equipment. He checked the duplicate invoices from the supplier, only to find that the actual sums paid were £9.67 and £7.57.

Suspecting that the invoices had been forged to prise bogus grants from the European social fund, which financed half his course, Mr Boonham passed the figures to his MP, Diana Organ. She raised the matter with the European social funding department. and was eventually told that a senior member of the staff had been suspended and that Kidsons Impey had been brought in to conduct an audit. She was promised the results of the audit but heard nothing.

The *Eye* can reveal that as a result of the audit the college has repaid £31,858 which it admits was incorrectly claimed for the bee-keeping course from the ESF, and that the suspended senior member of staff (who has now resigned) was Nick Robin. The college passed its information on to the Gloucestershire police fraud squad which has taken no further action.

PS: The college's previous auditor who somehow managed to miss these rather glaring discrepancies in the accounts was, needless to say, PricewaterhouseCooper.

Berk beck

PROFESSOR Eric Hobsbawm, fellow of Birkbeck College, London, admits in his latest book *The New Century* that his beloved communism was not an unqualified success.

"I know very well that the cause I embraced has proved not to work," he says. "Perhaps I shouldn't have chosen it. But, on the other hand, if people don't have any ideal of a better world, then they have lost something."

And now Hobsbawm's latest cause seems to have "lost something", too. The governors of Birkbeck College have discontinued Hobsbawm's "anniversary appeal committee", which had drawn up grand plans to raise £5m from former students and corporate donors. According to documents leaked to the *Eye*, Hobsbawm's committee wanted a sum of about £70,000 to be "underwritten by the college" so that it could pay for the services of an external PR consultancy, a £12,500 feasibility study, a "development director" with a salary of £35-40,000 and an expense account of £5,000, plus a £15,000 appeals brochure and a £1,000 launch reception.

But when Birkbeck's master, Professor Tim O'Shea, tabled these proposals before the governors he was sent off with a flea in his ear – and Hobsbawm's committee of 17 Birkbeck graduates was discontinued. The governors decided that the expenditure it had recommended was ridiculous and that 17 professional people with expertise in various fields ought to have been able to do the business themselves, instead of shelling out college dosh.

Gone to seed?

DAVID BREWER, principal of East Yorks College at Bridlington, has been given three months' "garden leave". This is a novel phrase to most of the long-suffering staff, who note two aspects of the matter:

The announcement was made by acting principal Graham Smith who is about to appoint another acting principal, thus giving his own position a pleasant impression of permanence.

The Brewer's droop is believed to be not entirely unconnected with articles in recent issues of the *Eye*.

You can contact Paul Foot on 020 7287 3183 or the In the Back team on 020 7437 4017

In the City

THE understandable relief and hoopla surrounding the "rescue" of the Rover Longbridge plant by the Phoenix consortium felt by workers and politicians has obscured unanswered questions about the viability of the £10 to take it away deal. One concerns the business credentials of Rover's saviour and former boss John Towers. Put to one side his pre-1996 performance at Rover, hardly thriving when BMW took over. Look instead at his record more recently at Concentric, the engineering group he took over post-Rover.

When Towers arrived in October 1996 as Concentric chief executive, the company had sales of £147m and profits of £10.7m. The workforce was just over 2,000. Towers was hired to boost Concentric's lacklustre performance and was to be remunerated accordingly. His basic salary was £202,000 a year with a bonus scheme which could increase by 180 percent over a three-year period if earnings per share grew by more than 10 percent annually.

The first year of the Towers regime was far from impressive. Sales only grew to £150m but profits before write-offs were down to £9.2m and after "exceptional restructuring costs" there was a £4m loss. Not surprisingly there was no bonus, but with perks Towers still collected £217,000. However, the dividend was raised and staff numbers rose to 2,200. The chairman promised the company had built "a robust platform from which to move forward".

Er, not quite. The results to September 1998 revealed turnover down to £146m, profits before write-offs halved at £4.4m and only a smaller loss afterwards of £3.1m. The dividend was slashed by more than 50 percent. The workforce was also cut back to 2,000 again. Towers' pay and perks, however, rose to £231,000. At this point Towers led a management buy-out of Concentric for £87.5m with the aid of £56m of loan and equity finance plus £65m in bank facilities from NatWest and Royal Bank of Scotland. Towers became a major shareholder.

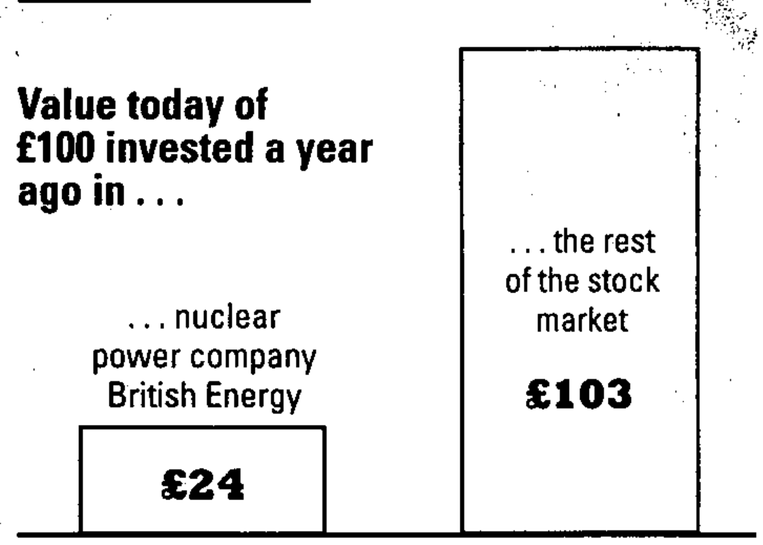
The first results of the new, privatised Concentric were published last month as Towers rode to the Rover rescue. They were unlikely to impress his latest backers. For the year to September 1999 sales of a now slimmed group were just £103m, there was only a £1.4m profit before write-offs and a loss afterwards of £23m which grew to £31m after interest. The workforce dropped to 1,500 — 25 percent below the figure when Towers arrived three years before. About the only thing going up was the chief executive's package — to £240,000.

Towers' achievements at Concentric should be considered by those at Longbridge, and trade minister Stephen Byers, who see the Phoenix bid as saving jobs and votes. They may also wonder how onerous may yet be the financial liabilities BMW was so keen to offload and Alchemy Partners so unwilling to accept. These include not just the cost of buying back in three years time heavily discounted Rovers sold in recent months, but also a possible "black hole" in the Rover pension fund due to the pre-BMW stripping out of surpluses.

Meanwhile Concentric's backers may not be too displeased if John Towers' now turns his turnaround talents to Rover.

Stock Horror

MELTDOWN AT *British Energy*



ONE of the remarkable aspects of rail privatisation was the way safety was never mentioned until there was a major accident. The privatised rail operators and Railtrack gushed in great detail to shareholders and backers about revenues, profits and capital returns, but in many cases made at best cursory and in some cases no mention of safety.

Even when safety was mentioned it was in a genuflectional manner on the basis that, like mothers and apple pie, it was a good thing. But even then it had to pay its way and not curb profits.

Railtrack at least gave shareholders an annual two-page Safety Report. But this was less than the space devoted to finance or corporate governance in an 80-page document. In a 1997 bond prospectus it merited just 33 lines in 114 pages!

Then came Southall. But even after that crash some found it hard to change their tune. In its 1998 barely two-page "Safety Statement", while announcing that "safety remains Railtrack's highest priority", the company responsible for the deadly signal at Paddington sent mixed signals itself. Reducing the risk of fatal accidents was only "a priority" and when considering safety enhancements, like APT, it was vital to also consider "the impact of their cost". Railtrack's safety director Roderick Muttram argued against the merits of APT.

A year later and Railtrack chief executive Gerald Corbett explained: "Unless the providers of the finance can earn a return commensurate with the risk, the funding will not be available." Muttram, in his two pages, emphasised that "Railtrack is concerned with safety in its broadest sense". The next Railtrack report can be guaranteed to contain a lot more on that "concern".

Among the rail operators who saw safety as of no interest to shareholders was Thames Trains, one of whose trains caused the Paddington disaster.

Last week the public inquiry into that crash was told how Thames Trains had decided the £5.26m bill to install the ATP safety system on the Oxford line was too high — despite paying out more than that in two years' dividends. But this decision is far from surprising when considering the manner in which safety was treated in reports to shareholders by both Thames Trains and its parent, the Go-Ahead Group.

The first Thames Trains directors' report after privatisation in 1996 contains not a word on safety. The company paid a £740,000 dividend even through it made a loss.

The 1998 report, signed off two days after the Southall crash, once again was silent on safety but with plenty of references to how the company "continued to find ways to serve its customers better". There were also references to the near £6m profit, the £4m dividend and the £6m paid to Thames Trains directors and employees for their 35 percent stake in the business.

Amazingly the 1999 Thames Trains directors' report, signed off a month before Paddington, again contained not one word about safety! But there was admission of a "disappointing poor performance" on punctuality forcing the provision of discounts to season ticket holders.

As a quoted company Go-Ahead produces a much more fulsome report to its shareholders. But its 1997 report also found no room for any mention of safety even though acquiring two rail franchises (Thameslink is the other), had helped to almost double profits.

Two days before Southall Go-Ahead produced its 1998 report. Once again there was no room in more than 40 pages to address the safety issue. Shareholders were told that rail profits had more than doubled to £10.7m and profit margins had increased. Furthermore free cash flow was almost tripled to £45m and £5.7m, more than the cost of APT for Thames Trains, had been realised from asset sales.

Shareholders were reassured there would be "even greater emphasis on maintaining cost effective as well as reliable railways". They were also told about "a number of operating problems" caused by congestion at Paddington. But a "majority" of these were "outside the direct control of the company". The fitting of APT was not among them.

A year on from Southall and weeks before Paddington, Go-Ahead could no longer ignore the safety issue in its 1999 report. But not before chairman Sir Frederick Holliday had assured shareholders that "investment will only be attractive if future income flows are adequate and sufficiently long term in nature to justify the investment". He went on: "It is difficult to see a way to justify investing further in either Thames Trains or Thameslink Rail until we have sufficiently long franchise terms to recover our investment". Such as that £5.26m on APT no doubt.

Despite the decision not to fit APT Holliday declared Go-Ahead "takes a very proactive stance and regards health, safety and environmental issues as a priority". Notice "a" not "the". Passengers, he conceded, "have a right to expect safe transport". Words that will come back to haunt him.

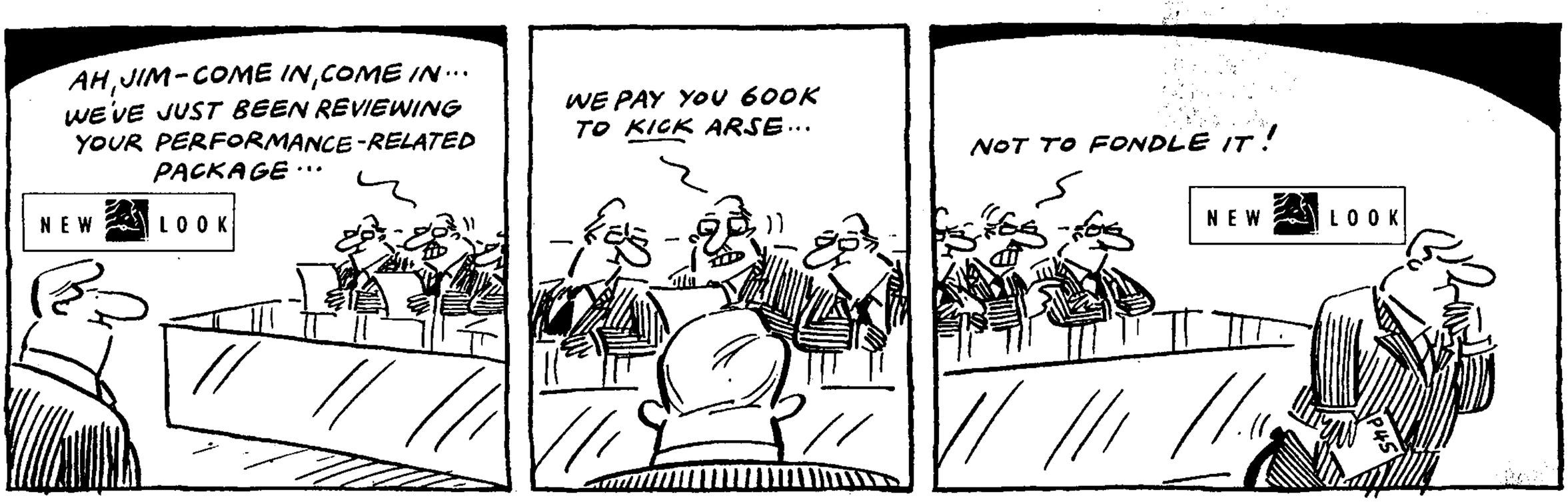
The company's operating review declared safety "remains the first priority", but while boasting of installing the lesser (and cheaper) TPWS safety system at Thameslink made no mention of deciding not to spend on APT at Thames Trains.

Go-Ahead shareholders, if not its rail passengers, had much to smile about. Rail profits were up by almost 50 percent to more than £14m, margins were widening and dividends were rising. How much did the six institutional shareholders who alone own 25 percent of Go-Ahead care anyway about safety? Questions that might be put to those who run Friends (Provident) Ivory & Sime, Robert Fleming, Scottish Mutual, Scottish Value Management, Standard Life and Gartmore. Especially if Go-Ahead loses its franchises for failing to spend a mere £5m.

'Slicker'

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE/RIGG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NEW LOOK
DIRECTORS

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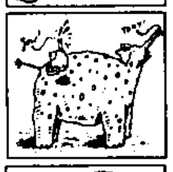
Cartoon Gallery

A selection of cartoons, illustrations and animated cels can be found on the Cartoon Gallery Website, from Chris Riddell to Steve Bell, Alex to Appleby, Honeysett to Husband and McLachlan to Matt.



The site also has extensive biographies, including Ronald Searle and Kipper Williams and the merchandise pages offer a selection of books by top cartoonists from Britain and abroad.

All cartoons and books are dispatched within three working days via our mail order department, so for the speculative and gift buyer alike, please visit:
www.cartoongallery.co.uk

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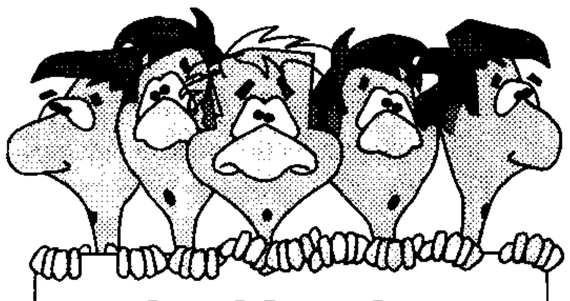

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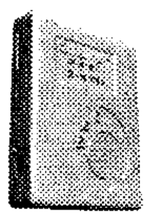

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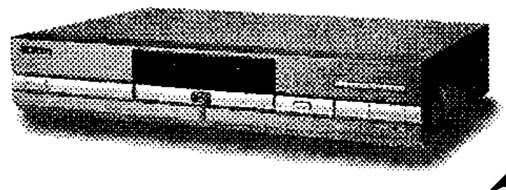

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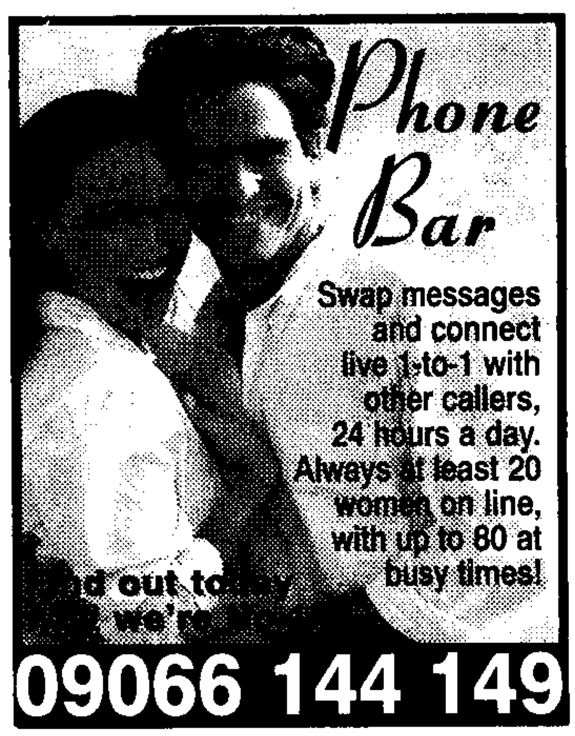
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Harry Potter will be going head to head with the Mafia this summer when the fourth of J K Rowlings successful children's books is published. The third of Mario Puzo's Mafia Trilogy, *of which the first two books,* The Godfather *and* The Last Don, *have sold 20million copies, is scheduled to come out in early July, the same week as* Harry Potter and the Doomspell Tournament. *The Harry Potter story has been in the top ten on* Amazon.com *for months owing to advance orders. "We're not going to be intimidated by some little kid's book", Puzo's editor said, "That wizard's going to be wearing cement shoes by the end of the summer."*
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THIS GOOD LOOKING (temporarily attached) 38 yr old architect wants to re-discover romance, passion, love and laughter with an adventurous, attached female. London. Box 0102.

INTELLIGENT WOMAN, 39, warm, attractive and well-rounded, WLTM cultured, sensitive and unattached man, 35-45. Glos. Box 0202.

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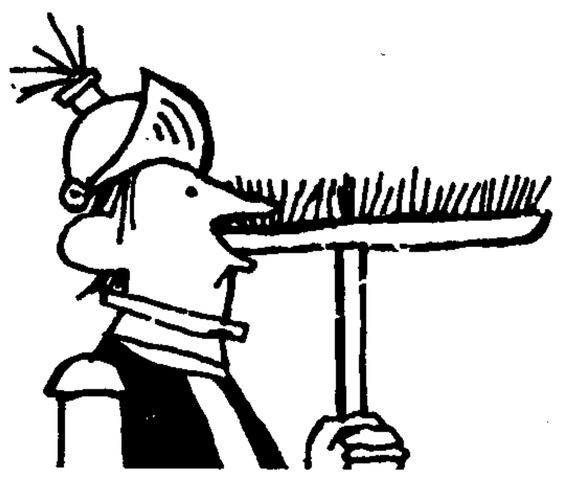

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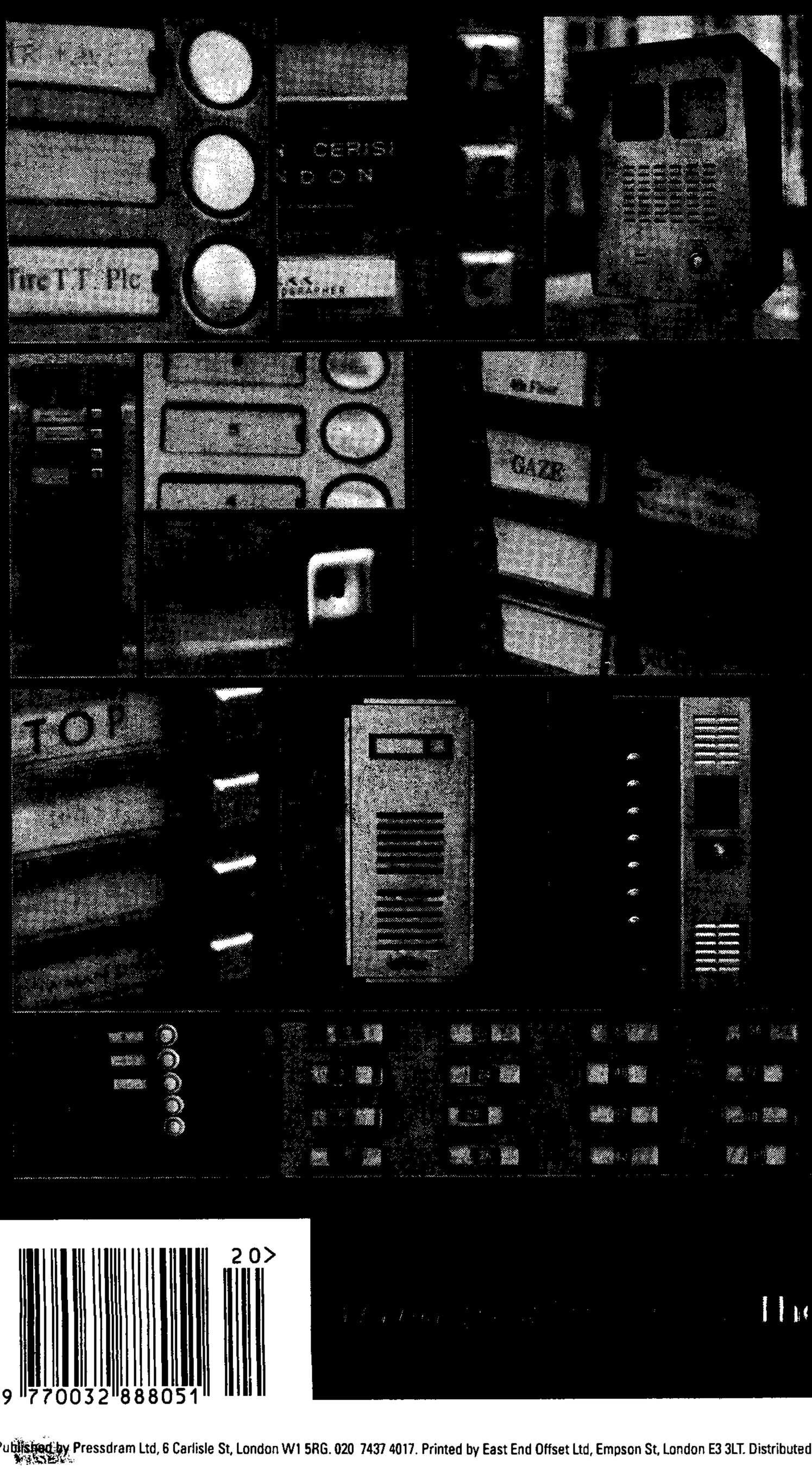

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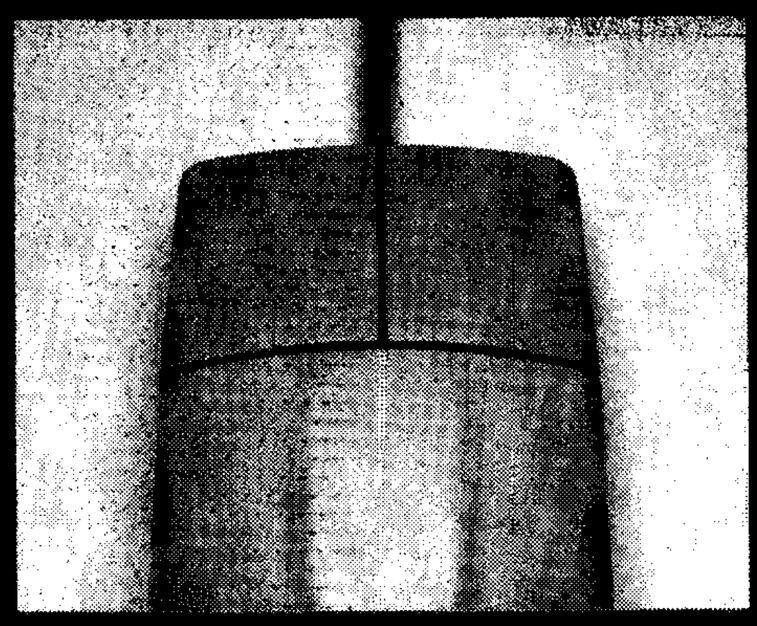

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